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[PAUL TIGHTENED HIS HOLD AND SLOWLY FORCED MARY DOWN ON TO THE STONE WHERE SHE HAD BEEN SITTING!]

WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE quiet life at Barrackbourne did indeed do Greville good. The influence of home, of absolute sympathy with all about him, worked in a soft yet definite way about his troubled nerves and aching heart.

It touched him to see how eager his mother was to help and comfort him in a tender, unspoken way. They fell back into their old habits; and sometimes Lady Barrackbourne would sigh as if it were some pleasant dream, and not her dear boy, in reality, who sat in her dainty boudoir reading by the lamp-light, and smoking and falling into an argument as of old.

She had written and asked Mary and Esther to come and stay at the Castle, but, to her intense regret, Mary had sent a gentle refusal.

"We are bound for a tour in Scotland. Esther is dying to transport the whole of the Highlands to canvas. I am so sorry, dear Lady Barrackbourne. You will believe, I am

sure, when I tell you that nowhere do I have such pleasure as at Barrackbourne Castle in your society. Another time I hope you will let us come."

Another time, Mary added to herself, when you will be alone, and he will be back in London, and at work.

She could scarcely hold the pen in her hand to write this refusal. It was such a temptation. A vision of the peaceful, happy days that she would spend wandering about that old castle, seeing him, hearing his voice, living as it were in the mere knowledge of his presence.

Mary's face was white as death as she thought all this. She was frightened at the rapidity and strength of her love. It seemed to her as though she were in the hands of some great and mysterious power, that ruled her whole being, and touched her very soul.

She must fight against this power, she said to herself, in a vague, weary sort of way. She must resolutely shut out the warm, golden joy that seemed to thrill her even in imagination.

Tears and doubts filled her mind. Paul's

face was always before her. Whispers of lone's folly had reached her. Dick's meaning seemed to grow clearer and clearer—the trouble he had spoken of that had touched Greville. Mary had no need to ask an explanation. She knew, and she shrank from the knowledge, as she would have shrunk from some horrible reptile.

It was Paul's work. As yet she could not quite understand the reason. Her secret was so new that she did not think of allaying it to this thing as the cause. In a dim sort of way she realised that Paul had some motive against herself in his present action, but what it was Mary could not tell as yet.

Esther was honestly disappointed at not going to Barrackbourne.

"I would much rather paint Yorkshire than Scotland, and I want to finish Lady Barrackbourne's portrait. Mary, we are always happy with her. Can we not change our minds?"

"If you like, dear!" Mary said, in a low, hurried voice; "but I—I seem to have a longing to see Scotland!"

Esther looked round from her easel. They were sitting, as they frequently did, in her

studio. She was silent for a moment. But the expression on Mary's face gave her food for thought.

"She has a reason. What is it?" she said to herself.

Wise, and full of tact as ever, she immediately fell into Mary's plans.

"Now you mention it, I may as well confess I share the longing," she said, briskly. "Only I imagined you were going all the way to the Hebrides just to please me!"

"I would go much farther than that to please you, dear!" Mary said, with a smile.

Esther turned from her work to kiss her.

"Bless you, my angel!" she said, tenderly. "As if I did not know that without your telling me so!"

Esther went on painting and thinking, and Mary appeared to be writing hard at her letters. Esther had been more than troubled about her darling of late. She saw that there was a new shadow fallen on the tender heart, but she asked no questions; she only increased her love and care, if that were possible, and prayed unceasingly that Mary might be guarded from all danger through any work of Paul Angelotti's.

She did not even guess the truth. If she had imagined a love in Mary's sorrowful heart she had chafed it round Dick Fraser. It was so natural to love him, she said to herself; and when he loved again as he loved Mary, who could blame her if she faltered and forgot for a moment the cruel bonds that held her? No! Esther had no knowledge of the truth.

Greville was silent when his mother read out Mary's refusal. He felt strangely sorry; why he could scarcely have told. True, he had more than a sincere liking, an honest gratitude for the lovely woman, who had repaid him so sweetly for that curious charity he had given her a year ago.

Still, Mary had no definite place in his thoughts. She mingled in unconsciously with the dreamy memories of art and poetry that flitted through his brain as he sat thinking; and often, when he went into the library to write his letters, his eyes would go involuntarily to the large couch, with its dark velvet cushion, on which, in fancy, he could see that fair, white head lying like some sleeping angel!

This, and the thought of pleasure in recalling Dick's love for this woman, and his probable happiness, were all the links that held Mary in his memory. It was, therefore, almost with a start that Greville realised that he shared most sincerely in his mother's regret and disappointment over Mary's refusal. He wandered about restlessly for a whole day after the receipt of that letter, and, by and by, when he found himself in Ocho's room, he felt that the child's tears of disappointment at the fact of not seeing "Mrs. Arbuthnot," roused a ready sympathy in his breast.

He heard very rarely from Ione. The yacht was gone north, and, as she was a big sea-going vessel, the party were absent from land a week at a time, and so unable to write or receive letters.

He was not anxious for his wife's safety, for Captain Letroy was a skilled sailor in every sense of the word; and he felt, with a shrob of pain, that there could be no doubt Ione was enjoying herself, and did not need him, or she would not have hesitated to appraise him of the fact. He was content, in a weary sort of way, to let things be, but he was roused from this mood by a few words from his mother.

Lady Barrackbourne had taken many counsels with herself as to whether she would or would not interfere, but, at last, her worldly wisdom overbore her great love.

"My dear," she said to him one day, very, very gently, "I have something to say about your wife!"

Greville put down his paper with a flush on his face.

"About Ione, mother?" he said.

"Yes; about Ione! Greville, my darling,

you know what it costs me to tell you to go from me, even for a day! but, my boy, I fear you are not doing right. Ione is too young, too beautiful, to be left so long alone. You must go to her, Greville, at once!"

"She does not want me, mother," the young man answered, bitterly.

Lady Barrackbourne sighed a quick, deep sigh.

"Must sacred duties be put on one side for mere sentimental reasons, Greville?" she asked, gently, yet there was a reproach in her voice that he felt immediately.

His face flushed again.

"You are right, as you always are, dear mother. How wise you are, how good!"

He took her thin white hand, and kissed it reverently.

"You will go, my darling, at once!" Lady Barrackbourne said, not quite steadily.

"I will leave to-morrow morning, my dear one. I shall just catch the yacht at Holyhead."

They sat quietly hand-in-hand after that, and when he rose to go away his mother spoke again.

"Bring her home, Greville, my dear. If you have been wrong I—I, too, have erred. I should have remembered Ione was nothing but a spoilt child. One cannot expect an old head on young shoulders. She needs gentle guidance and help. Let her find it here!"

Greville stooped once again, and kissed the hand he held.

"I will bring her home, mother," he said, and then they separated for the night; and next morning early Greville had left Barrackbourne, and was travelling to Holyhead.

He telegraphed to his wife to tell her he was coming, and Ione received the telegram with her other letters. She was annoyed and cross at this news. Her temper, in fact, was anything but pleasant. The yachting trip she had so set her heart upon had not developed those joys she had anticipated. True, Angelotti was one of the party; but following up his cunning plan of action, he had shown very little desire to be constantly in Lady Greville's society, choosing instead to pay considerable attention to a certain pretty little married woman who was on board. Ione had been furious, and now was miserable. Life without Angelotti appeared dull, stale and unprofitable. Her infatuation for him increased a hundredfold, as he calmly intimated it should do.

He knew that when the moment was ripe for the fulfilment of his scheme, Ione would play into his hands even better than he had expected. Things were in this condition when the yacht touched at Holyhead, and Ione learnt that Greville was coming. At first, she resolved not to see him. It would be, of course, the easiest thing in the world to conceal the knowledge of his arrival from her friends, and the yacht would have weighed anchor before he could reach Holyhead; but, after a moment's thought, Ione determined to let her husband come. She wanted to have some one at her beck and call, and if she could not utilise Angelotti there was always Greville to fall back upon. Whether Angelotti guessed the nature of her telegram it is not possible to say; but for a doubtless good reason of his own he chose this moment to be his old tender self to the selfish, dainty, red-haired creature whom he had learnt to despise for her weakness, and paradoxically to admire for her pertinacity.

Ione naturally rose to his bait, and the sun shone once again for her.

"Greville is coming; isn't he a bore?" she said, with a pout, to Paul.

"Quite right. He should guard his pearl well, or it may be stolen one of these days," was Angelotti's answer. "Does he go on with us to Ireland?"

"I hope not," Ione said, sincerely. "I don't think he intends to do so. Of course, he could not leave that silly old mother so long alone!"

"You do not love Lady Barrackbourne, *mignonne*?" Paul said, with a smile.

"I hate her!" Ione answered, vehemently. "She has sent Greville to take you back, *ma mie*?" said the soft Italian voice.

Ione flashed crimson.

"I will not go! How dare she? Am I a child? I hate Barrackbourne, and I hate her! Nothing will make me go!"

"Not even if I am there?" Paul murmured, softly.

Ione looked at him for a moment.

"That makes a difference; certainly," she said, hurriedly; "but—"

"But if Lady Greville Earne goes to Barrackbourne Castle, Signor Angelotti will avail himself of an oft-repeated invitation and appear there also. Lady Barrackbourne is so fond of music. I wonder she does not invite Mrs. Arbuthnot more often."

Ione frowned, as she always did at Mary's name.

"I hate that woman too!" she said, sharply.

Paul laughed.

"You are generous in your hate, *cara mia*!"

Ione tapped the desk with her dainty shoe.

"I can love as well as hate, Paul!" she said, just looking at him out of her violet eyes.

He smiled back at her, and said something pretty to her; but to himself he laughed at the transparent vanity and jealousy of this woman.

"You will come back to Barrackbourne with us?" Ione asked; and he answered steadily.—

"I will follow immediately, *mignonne*."

Greville was agreeably surprised to find Ione so amenable to return with him to the Castle. He had anticipated a little objection.

"The rest and quiet after all this sea air will finish your recovery," he said to her, as he looked at her piquant face and wondered in a vague sort of way why he felt so dull and heavy, and where was the sort of exhilaration that had always come upon him when he was with Ione.

"Who is at Barrackbourne?" Ione inquired; and when Greville told her the Castle had not a single guest she frowned.

"I shall like the old drama if we don't ask some people!" she declared, peevishly. She did not want her *de-d-three* with Angelotti thus summarily dismissed. "Why cannot we have the theatricals we were going to have at Easter?" This idea had been suggested to her by Angelotti. "Your mother is better, and Ocho is not going to die yet, apparently."

Greville was silent for a moment.

"If you would like this it can be managed, I am sure," he said, feeling as though some one had played a jarring discord and so set his nerves quivering.

Of a surety, he told himself, he had done wrong to plunge so deeply into politics. He had overworked himself; he was quite a changed man.

Ione parted from her yachting friends and returned to Barrackbourne.

She was atrociously dull the first few days, but then she began to recover.

Angelotti was coming at the end of the week.

Lady Barrackbourne had acquiesced silently to the idea of the theatricals.

It was all too evident that Ione could not exist without some perpetual excitement.

Now that she was returned once more, Greville's mother felt how absolutely impossible it was to try and mould the girl into the wife she desired for Greville.

"We must have the original cast," Ione declared. "We must write to Mrs. Arbuthnot."

"Mrs. Arbuthnot is in Scotland. We must have a substitute for her part," Greville answered.

Ione frowned.

"Impossible. Angelotti will not sing with

a substitute. I am quite sure Mrs. Arbuthnot will come, if your mother writes to her, and says that dear Otho is so anxious for her to come."

The sneer in the last words was not unnoticed by Greville, but he said nothing, and that same day a letter was sent to Scotland, asking Mary to come. The answer was satisfactory.

"It will be odd if I don't find some way of making my lady uncomfortable now that she is under the same roof with me," Ione said to herself.

By dint of telegraphing, and writing busily, she succeeded in getting all the original cast, and in a few days Barrackbourne was alive with visitors. The news that the theatricals were to take place for certainty this time was received with much delight in the neighbourhood; and as the various houses dotted about were busy assembling shooting parties, the audience threatened to be a large and aristocratic one.

Mary arrived at the little station in a nervous condition.

"I don't know why you should come if you don't want to," Esther said to her bluntly. "The very thought of that brute has taken all the life out of you, Mary!"

"I could not refuse," Mary said, hurriedly. "It would look so strange, dear and then, after all, it is a pleasure to be with Lady Barrackbourne, and—with little Otho."

She sat back silent, as the brougham rolled along the road.

"If—if only I had not this presentiment, Esther, that something was going to happen, I—"

"Stuff and nonsense. What is going to happen," Esther said boldly, much more certainly than she felt. "If Angelotti had intended to play you any dirty trick, he would have done it before now. Cheer up, Mary, my darling, and be comforted."

But Mary was not easily soothed.

"It is the false position, the thought of what he may do, hanging, as it were, like a sword above my head. Oh! Esther, dear, I sometimes wish that the struggle, the fears and dreads, were all over. Heaven knows life has had but little charm for me that I should cling to it."

"Mary," Esther said, sitting bolt upright, "talk once more like that, and I carry you off to London this very moment. Indeed I think I shall do it, as it is."

She put her hand on the carriage door with a determined look, but Mary stooped her.

"No, no, my dear! I would rather go on. You are right. I am foolish, weak to a fault, but I will be better. I—I am better already. I feel strong enough to face anything, however bad. I did so well before, Esther, I cannot surely fall now can I?"

And all the while above her, beyond, around, there clung that mysterious, unsatisfactory, yet determined belief that a blow would fall on her peace and independence before she quitted the precincts of Barrackbourne Castle.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE rehearsals were begun in real earnest. Ione was once more keen to shine as a mimic princess, and on every available opportunity she and Angelotti retired to one of the drawing-rooms to study the music and practise the concerted parts.

Greville was greatly occupied with his work for the forthcoming season, but he nevertheless found plenty of time to mingle in with the amateur actors, and help as far as lay in his power.

He was not particularly suspicious or quick to imagine things, but it began to dawn on him after awhile that Mrs. Arbuthnot seemed to shirk his society in a curiously nervous way. If he spoke to her for a moment she would make some hurried excuse and make her escape.

She was changed in other ways too, he determined. With a throb of pity and sympathy he discovered that she was growing much frailer and paler; her beauty was more transparent, her lovely face more delicate.

He found himself watching her very often, and the more he watched the more interested he was. He felt a sort of curious protection over this slender, widowed woman, who had appealed to him once for help. He wished there was something he could do for her.

All at once the idea came to him that it was Dick she wanted—that she was fretting over Dick's absence.

"I will write and bring him home," he said to himself—Mr. Fraser was spending his long vacation in America. "Why did he go? It is plain to me she is wearing her heart out for him, poor little thing!"

He came upon her one afternoon walking in the grounds. It was a memorable afternoon.

"I think I must take upon myself to scold you, Mrs. Arbuthnot!" he said, smiling. "I am sure this air is much too damp and cold for you!"

"I do not feel it," Mary said hurriedly, "and I must have a walk now and then."

"Have you seen the old refectory? It is not far. Will you let me take you there, Mrs. Arbuthnot?"

Mary murmured her acquiescence, and turned beside him.

"I remember that Dick and I used to have fine larks here!" Greville said, after he had chatted on for a time. "Dear old Dick; I wish he were here now!"

Mary was silent. She, too, longed for the comfort and protection of such a friend against any danger that might come.

"The best fellow in the world!" Greville went on. "Don't you like him, Mrs. Arbuthnot?"

Mary sighed faintly.

"Like is not the word to use to express my regard for Mr. Fraser," she said involuntarily.

Greville was puzzled.

She spoke warmly, but, somehow, the touch of a lover's heart did not ring in her voice. He felt, perhaps, he had better say no more; such things were too delicate and mysterious to be handled clumsily.

Mary grew less nervous as they walked, and Greville had a distinct sense of pleasure. After all, it must have been fancy on his part. Why should she shrink from him—why, indeed?

They reached the old ruins, all moss-covered and ivy garbed, and Mary sat down and looked about her.

"How my father would have loved this old place!" she said, involuntarily.

"You are alone in the world," Greville said, almost tenderly, as she was silent again.

She shivered.

"But for my dear Esther I am alone!" Her thoughts went for a moment to her dead aunt, and she sighed.

Greville put out his hand impulsively.

"Let me call myself your friend, Mrs. Arbuthnot, your real, true, sincere friend!"

Mary's heart was beating like a sledge-hammer in her ears. She felt she could have fallen at his feet, and kissed the ground beneath him.

Once again the strength, the power of her love, alarmed her. She quivered from head to foot as she put her hand in his.

"Friends if you will, Lord Greville!" she said, faintly. "I—I am grateful to you for your offer!"

"Grateful!" Greville said, involuntarily. "It is I who should be grateful to you for all your sweet thoughts of my mother. Any kindness to her is treasured and remembered by me, Mrs. Arbuthnot, believe me!"

"I love your mother!" Mary said, simply, looking away from him. "She is to me all that a good, pure woman should be!"

Greville thanked her with a voice full of emotion. He had suffered so much disappointment and pain in the knowledge that his

mother held no place in Ione's respect or esteem that these words of Mary's fell with double pleasure to his ears.

The full sweetness of this woman's nature came to him in this moment, and some new and indefinable sensation stirred his heart as he looked down upon her—so beautiful, so sorrowful, so pure of face!

"Turn to my mother, Mrs. Arbuthnot," he said, gently. "If you should want comfort or help, you will get the best from her, a woman of noble heart and courage, who has suffered her share of sorrows bravely and uncomplainingly. She, too, loves you. I have seen that now for some time, and I am glad to know it!"

Tears sprang to Mary's eyes. Her beating heart was full to the brim. That he should speak to her like this was a joy too great for words; and yet behind the joy there was that horrible dread.

Would he still say such words did he but know the truth?—that her widowhood was a lie, that she was wife to a man who—

She bent her head and spoke hurriedly.

"Lord Greville, may I ask you to—to let me stay here for a little while alone? I—I—"

Greville understood her at once.

"Will you let me come back and fetch you, or can you find your way through the house by yourself? Yes! Then remember to bear to your right, and let me beg of you to come in soon. We cannot let our nightingale risk so much danger to her throat."

He turned away as he spoke, and vanished in the distance.

Mary watched him go with tear-blinded eyes.

"My love! my king! my hero! Oh, what is this madness that has come upon me! I must remember—I must kill this feeling! Have I not suffered enough?"

She spoke the last words aloud, unconscious of the utterance. Her head was buried in her hands, and she awayed herself to and fro uncertainly.

"Have I not suffered enough!" she said, in a passion of hopelessness.

A hand was laid on her shoulder, and a voice answered her broken utterance.

"Apparently not, my Mary, to judge by appearances."

She started to her feet, and then stood with one hand leaning against a portion of the moss-covered wall for support.

Paul was leaning also against the wall, his arms folded on his breast, the perpetual and horrible smile on his lips. His eyes were fixed on the lovely, agitated face so near to him with an expression that was not easy to understand.

"So you have fallen a victim to *l'indolence de vos yeux*. *Si donc ma femme vous faites des bêtises*. It is, to say the least of it, a folly to weep out your beautiful eyes for one who has no two thoughts for you; who is, moreover, a married man; and you, moreover, are a woman with the unfortunate appendage of a husband! *Des bêtises! des bêtises, ma chère!*"

Mary was trembling from head to foot, but she rallied her courage and her strength.

"Your remarks are an insult, monsieur," she said, coldly, drawing herself up proudly, removing her hand from the supporting wall, and standing erect and graceful before him.

Paul laughed.

"A husband can say much to his wife!"

Mary looked at him straight out of her beautiful eyes.

"I have no husband," she said distinctly, and as calmly as she could.

"Pardon, madame. I regret to contradict you so unceremoniously, but facts are stubborn things."

"I have no husband," Mary repeated, with a shiver. The afternoon dusk was creeping on, and against herself a fear of this man came all masked into her heart. She knew his treachery, his cunning. No snakes or loathsome reptile was more dangerous than Paul Cosanza.

Paul laughed again.

"Madame is persistent," he said, in an amused sort of way. "Madame is pleased to jest."

"I have no husband," Mary said for the third time. "The law declares a marriage null and void after years of desertion, monsieur."

"Madame has an excellent knowledge of the law," Paul answered suavely. "Madame is quite correct; nevertheless, I am bound once again to contradict madame, and to inform her that she is unfortunately burdened with a husband—one too who will have no hesitation in proclaiming and demanding his rights when he feels inclined to do so!"

Mary shivered, but her courage did not desert her.

"You have no rights over me, Paul," she said, with absolute coldness.

"Bo!" he exclaimed, with a short laugh. "We progress. You call me Paul. *Bon!* we are getting on!"

"I am a woman now, remember," Mary went on, a touch of the passion and agitation within her breaking the coldness of her voice. "You cannot frighten me as you used to do. I am not to be cowed or bullied. I hold myself free from you, and I shall appeal to the law to ratify that freedom."

"The law will not help you *ma femme*," Paul said leisurely, as he lit a cigarette and put it between his lips. "At least, I do not think you will appeal to the law. You," he paused a moment, and blew a small cloud of tobacco from between his lips, "you are much more likely to appeal to me, my Mary!"

Mary's face flushed; she drew her cloak about her.

"With your permission I will return to the house," she said, coldly.

"Madame is free to go when she likes," was the quiet answer. "It is a charming house, most certainly. A fine old place, a noble name, a name of honour of weight and integrity. Truly, it will be a sorry thing to see a shame fall on such a name. Do you not think so, Mary?"

Mary paused as she was turning away. "You speak in riddles. I cannot follow you," she said contemptuously, and yet there was a fear sprung up in her heart—a horrible fear that was not quite intelligible—but which existed all the same.

"The riddles have an easy solution," Paul said, dropping the bantering tone. "No, Mary," as she was moving on, "I have changed my mind. I prefer that you do not return to the house just immediately. I have something to say to you!"

Mary's pulses throbbed and beat nervously. "I desire to have no further conversation with you," she said, as steadily as she could manage.

For answer he put his slender hand on her arm.

"I wish to speak to you," he said, quietly. His face was very pale. He had tossed the cigarette from his lips. The hold on her arm was like iron.

"You have lost none of your cowardice," Mary said, bitterly. "You still know how to use force to something weaker than yourself."

Paul only smiled and tightened his hold. Slowly but surely he forced her down on to the stone upon which she had been sitting when he first came upon her.

Mary felt powerless in his grip. The hot blood of anger and pride rushed to her face.

"There is no need to insult me farther," she said, in quick, low tones. "Release my arm! I will hear what you have to say."

"Your obedience is marvellous!" the man sneered.

He took his hand away slowly, and stood looking down on the lovely face of the woman whom he knew despised him, and hated him as far as her gentle nature would permit her to hate anyone. The passion of his anger and jealousy rose hot within him.

He was silent so long that Mary spoke first—spoke, looking straight before her, coolly, calmly, her manner far from betraying the mental agony she was enduring.

"You wish to speak to me, you say. Pray do so. I am listening."

He moved and stood before her with his arms folded.

"When do you intend to announce our marriage to the world?" he asked, in a sullen, deliberate sort of way.

Mary raised her eyes to his. "Never!" she said, quietly and coldly.

"When am I to take my proper place?" he asked, in the same deliberate way.

Once again she answered him,— "Never!"

"Your mind is resolved on that point?" he asked.

"Absolutely resolved!"

He shut his teeth with a click. "What if I force you to change your resolution?"

"Force!" Mary rose to her feet and faced him fearlessly. "Do your worst, Paul Cosanza," she said, with supreme dignity. "I defy you!"

He turned very pale.

"Be warned, Mary—be warned!"

She looked at him steadily.

"I do not fear you!" she said. "I have no reason to fear you!"

"There are others in the world beside yourself, Mary," he said, in a choked sort of way.

Once again her heart contracted with fear, but she would not let him see it.

"There are no others concerned in the question save you and I!" she answered, as calmly as she could.

"Our marriage that was, maybe," he said, in a dogged sort of way. "But what of the future? Do we stand alone there, Mary?"

"Who should stand with us?" was her answer.

Paul looked at her in silence for a moment.

"You fence well; but you understand better, *ma mie*. Yes—yes, you understand. You know that there are others concerned in our future—others whose honour touches your heart very nearly."

"I do not understand you," Mary said, brokenly. Alas! she was only prevaricating. She understood him too well.

Paul looked at her again with a smile.

"I will explain to you, my Mary, so that you may understand right well!"

(To be continued.)

HIS ICE QUEEN.

—C—

CHAPTER XXX.—(continued).

THERE WAS A pause. It was the hardest thing which Godfrey could have been asked to do, for he dearly loved the service.

Lady Marie understood his feelings, and sympathised with him. Her soft hand crept into his.

"For my sake, love!" she whispered. "Think how happy that would make me! To have you always, yet never to lose them!"

"I consent," he said, "since you and my darling think it for the best, and I thank you for your kindly feelings towards me. I will try to make you all contented with her choice. From now my darling's happiness shall be my first thought and care."

"Right you are, lad! Then the whole thing has resolved itself into a nutshell!"

"Yes, without a 'kernel!'" cried Lady Marie.

"No, there will be no Colonel now!" replied Godfrey, with a smile; "but your love will make up to me for all!"

"Settled then!" ended Lord Carstairs.

"And now for the chops!"

"Cutlets, my dear!" corrected the Countess.

"I apologise," he returned, with mock gravity. "Come, all of you, and let us see if they are hot or cold. Hot, that's right! Let

us return thanks for the boon of hot-water dishes when we say our grace."

"My dear!" said the Countess; and they fell to, their merry voices shutting out her remonstrance.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNROMANTIC OFFER.

THE wish of Lady Marie was that Sir Godfrey should not be told of her engagement to Captain Hamilton while his anger was so hot against Frank; but he settled that question by inviting himself to The Towers for Christmas.

"Well, that is one of the best times he could come," said her ladyship, thoughtfully. "He will cool down a little before then, and there is no season of the year when hearts are so soft. Even the hardest must feel the influence of those words, 'peace and goodwill.' Yes, we shall coax my godfather over somehow!"

"You may, Marie," returned Frank. "I believe you could have wheedled St. Anthony himself, but it would be useless for me to enter upon the subject again. In fact, I think I had better go to Bramley's for a time. I believe my presence here would annoy Sir Godfrey."

"And I believe your absence would do so. But, go, for a little while; only, remember, your Christmas must be spent with us, unless you are allowed to be with Geraldine at the Priory, which I fear is very unlikely."

"Very unlikely. Rest assured, you will see me here, unless my uncle refuses to meet me."

"He won't be asked. Papa can invite who he likes to his own table; and you see he deposes me to do all that for him, in his name, and mamma's, of course, so it is settled."

Christmas was drawing near.

Mrs. FitzHerbert, having given her daughter till that date to decide, had referred no more to the vexed subject.

Both Captain De Lacy and Lord Northby were allowed at the house as much as they liked, but never together, so that the friction of jealousy did not take place in that direction.

Mrs. FitzHerbert was clever general enough to manage that; but as she never knew when Frank would arrive, he and De Lacy were constantly meeting, and the scowl upon both their faces bespoke no goodwill.

Frank was indignant that a man who had once treated his dear girl so badly should be allowed to cross her path again. He could not understand Mrs. FitzHerbert's action in the matter.

But Captain De Lacy's feeling against Frank was hatred born of mad jealousy.

It had been his face which Geraldine had noticed at the window.

He had seen her in Frank's arms, and the sight had enraged him.

He had witnessed his passionate kisses fall upon the upturned face, which had once glowed with love for him, and he felt what he had lost—felt that he could not bear it, and jealousy had flooded his brain like a flame of fire.

He determined that Frank Stanley should never have her. He meant to do his best to gain her himself, and failing that he would never let Frank do so.

He set his teeth firmly over that vow, and looked as Geraldine had seen him look through the window, and that terrible gaze had haunted her by night and day ever since. She avoided him when she found it possible to do so, but she could not always manage it.

It was strange how she now shrank from this man, whom once she had loved, with a shrinking so keen that she could scarcely understand it—so strong that, no matter how happy and joyful she was, he had the power to damp it, and render her sad and melancholy.

Mr. Bramley was her Mercury. He often

slipped a letter into her hand, sent under cover to him by Frank.

He had, in fact, done so upon this very morning of which we read.

Frank was leaving The Towers for a few days to stay with the Rector, who thoroughly enjoyed the romance of the affair; and he wrote asking Geraldine to meet him at the Rectory in the afternoon to tell him all her news, and to brighten his heart by the sight of her sweet face.

His note decidedly brightened hers.

She plied her needle cheerfully, singing over her work, as she embroidered some pretty nick-nacks for the home she hoped to have some day—straws for the nest which she and Frank were to build by-and-by; and as she sang she thought of it, pictured it, and dwelt upon his love most gladly. The door opened, and Mrs. FitzHerbert entered the room.

She advanced and laid her hand upon Geraldine's shoulder, coaxing her to look up at her.

"Christmas is not far off now, dear!" she said, gravely. "And I want to know whether you have thought of all I said to you. But now you must see Lord Northby. He is waiting to come in. Remember, darling, that he is my choice for you. He is quiet and unassuming; his position is splendid, his wealth undoubted. If not a passionate lover, all the better. He thoroughly knows what he wants. In you he would find it—a beautiful and elegant woman at the head of his table; and he has offered me a home if I choose to accept it. He is very nice about everything. You would never regret being his wife."

"Mother, how can you think that, when you know I love Frank Stanley? Must I see Lord Northby? It cannot fail to be unpleasant both to him and me," said Geraldine, sadly.

"Hush!" replied Mrs. FitzHerbert. "I hear his footstep. I asked him to follow me in here, and he is coming."

Lord Northby entered as she left off speaking, and advancing towards Geraldine, greeted her in a pleasant manner.

"I have come on a very agreeable mission, Miss FitzHerbert," he said, "about which, I believe, your good mother has told you!"

"Yes, I have done so," replied Mrs. FitzHerbert, with a friendly glance. "If it lay with me, Lord Northby, it would be very soon decided in your favour," saying which, she crossed to the door and departed, while poor Geraldine sat pale and miserable, waiting for the words to be spoken, so unpleasant to her to have to listen to.

"Miss FitzHerbert," he said, taking a chair uninvited—for Lord Northby knew his value, and was a man "all there"—"I have greatly admired you ever since we have known one another. Had I been an impulsive man I should have spoken long ago; but I am not. I have waited to see if I could like you as much as I admire you, and I find I do, and that is saying a great deal."

"Thanks to your mother's kindness I have had plenty of opportunities of judging what you are, and I have been greatly pleased with all I have seen of you. I am sure you would grace the position you would hold, and that I should be both proud and fond of my beautiful wife!"

Geraldine arose, a veritable "Ice Queen."

The wonderful eyes looked back at him as coldly as if the winter sun was glinting on an iceberg.

"Lord Northby," she said, "my mother ought never to have placed you or me in such a position. She is fully aware that my love is given to another, and her distaste to the union cannot alter the fact. I have no choice whatever but to refuse your offer. Even if I could make up my mind to such an untrue course, which I could never do, then you could scarcely wish to have a wife whose every thought is given to another?"

She stood before him, pale, proud, and almost defiant.

He was struck afresh by her great beauty,

and, rising, essayed to take her hand, but it was withdrawn most decidedly.

"No; I should be sorry if it were so bad as all that," he said, smiling at her. "But it is my belief that few men or women marry their first fancy, nor even their second. I must own I once had one for a lady double my age. Of course, I was very young then, and equally, of course, the passion did not last."

"The things which do, I take it, are the comforts of life, and the pleasures enjoyed in congenial company."

"I could offer you all this; you could meet me as far as that, surely? I do not expect any high-flown nonsense from you. In fact, I really should not like it. Your freedom from romantic folly is one of the things I have so much liked and admired in you."

"Naturally, I should be glad had you not cared for anyone else; but I have every confidence in your goodness and discretion, and feel sure that when engaged to me you would forget any little affair in the past. Very few men would ask so little as that of you!"

"Very few, I should think," she answered, in a tone of scorn. "Most men desire that their wives should love them."

"My dear Miss FitzHerbert," he persisted, "I have seen a good deal of life, and, I feel sure, that couples who have no violent feelings are the happiest. You have only to take up the daily papers to see that my theory is right. Murders from that fatal curse, jealousy, which is the upshot of love, are of constant occurrence."

"Whoever heard of a quiet, comfortable couple, without any wild devotion, doing that sort of thing? No one. They live quietly and respectfully, if one may apply such a term to people in our station of life. They live and let live. If the man wants to go to the races or his club, his wife has plenty of other things to amuse her, and won't trouble to reproach him. He appreciates his freedom, especially from domestic bickerings, and so does she. Believe me, those are the happy marriages, Miss Geraldine."

"Now, have I convinced you at all that, notwithstanding your late little love affair, of which your good mother most wisely informed me, that you and I may safely join hands and go through life together? I am not, in the least, afraid of the experiment. Only accept me, and 'beautiful Lady Northby' will be the toast of the London season. Yours will be a great triumph, Geraldine! You will be one of the richest women in society, and the most lovely! All London will be at your feet. Surely such a prospect should tempt you, my dear girl! Think over all I have said, if you like. I do not wish to hurry you. I will see you again—tomorrow, the next day, a week hence, if you will. I am not an impatient man."

Geraldine walked to the window, and stood there, tapping her foot upon the soft carpet.

"Had I the faintest thought of accepting you, Lord Northby, I should say you are far too patient. I should expect my lover to really care for me, and my husband not to pride himself upon his indifference. I should wish him to prefer his home to his club or the racecourse, and his wife's society to any other in the world; so, evidently, upon your own showing, I am not the style of wife you are seeking, and to sum up all, let me tell you that I consider those the meanest-minded of all who stoop to a *mariage de convenance*. I can far better forgive those who 'love not wisely, but too well.' One sin is born of the heart, the other of a sordid mind. No, Lord Northby, I would sooner slave for the man I love than live in luxury with any other, and my mind is fully made up to do so. I am not afraid of poverty in the least."

"You look splendid when you talk like that," he said. "You are still young. Your romance will wear off by-and-by. I confess I was unprepared to find so much in you, but, my dear girl, you don't know what it is to

slave. It takes off the romance, I assure you. I know people who have tried it, combined with poverty, and the result was disastrous! As I said before, think over the advantages of the position I can offer you, and have a talk to your mother about them, and I shall yet hope for a satisfactory answer."

"If by that you mean that I shall be tempted to weigh the good things you offer me against my own faith and truth, then, Lord Northby, you will never receive a satisfactory one. Kindly accept my refusal, now, with many thanks for the honour you have done me. You have paid me the greatest compliment you could, and I am quite willing to believe that you meant to be kind. It is a comfort to me to know that your affections will in no wise be wounded by my non-acceptance. Your pride might suffer if it became known, but you may trust to me not to mention what has taken place between us, and if you express the wish to my mother, she will certainly be silent too."

He stood hesitating for a few moments, then advanced with extended hand.

"I am sorry we don't see things in the same light," he said. "I wish I could bring you round to my way of thinking; but if it can't be, it can't. I should have been very proud of you, but there is no use in crying over spilt milk. Thank you for your promise of silence. For some reason a rejected man always is considered a very good joke. I have no wish to pose for it. We part friends Miss FitzHerbert. I like you as well as ever."

She was quite grateful to him for not making more fuss over his rejection, and willingly shook hands with him now that the subject had been closed, and answered quite cheerfully the few commonplace questions he asked before he dismissed himself from her presence.

"Foolish girl!" he murmured to himself, as he closed the door of the drawing-room. "She does not know what she is refusing, and all for what she calls love!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

LADY MARIE PLOTS TO UNEARTH THE SKELETON.

FRANK STANLEY had started for the Rectory at Harlington, driven in the dog-cart by Godfrey Hamilton, promising to return for Christmas-day, and the carriage had been sent to the station to meet Sir Godfrey.

Lady Marie was flitting hither and thither, making little tasteful arrangements, a tuft of red-berried holly there, a cluster of Christmas roses here, and a red and white camellia in another spot, and every few minutes she ran to the window to see whether her godfather was coming.

At last the sound of wheels smote upon her ear, and she went bareheaded to the hall door to greet him in the most unceremonious fashion.

At her own request she had been left at home alone, as she was anxious to coax Sir Godfrey into a good humour before he met her parents or Godfrey, the Earl and Countess having been deliberately sent out to pay visits.

"Welcome to the Towers once more, godfather!" cried Lady Marie, as she gave him a hand to help him out of the carriage, and kissed him as they stood together upon the doorstep. "I have sent the others out, you kind old thing, that I might have you all to myself. The fact is I want to talk secrets, and to get them all over before the others come home. I told you one once before, did I not? and you kept it; and now I am going to trust you again."

"That is right, dear Marie, I would do anything for you, and you know it," he said, affectionately, as he patted the sunny head, as he used to do in her childhood. "What is it, dear?"

She helped him out of his wraps, and, taking

his arm, led him to the boudoir, where Godfrey had told her of his love, and forcibly placed him in the largest easy chair by the fire. Then she drew an embroidered footstool to his feet, and, seating herself upon it, she placed her arms upon his knees and looked up into his face.

"Godfather," she said, "I have heard something to your disadvantage. I could not be just the same to you till it is cleared up, you see, so I think I had better come to the point at once."

He looked at her thoroughly puzzled.

"I really don't understand," he said, "unless it is Frank—"

"It isn't Frank; I am very sorry about him; but it is worse than that. Godfather, you will promise to tell me the truth, will you not?"

"Certainly I will, child. I promise that."

"That is right. I trust your word implicitly. Godfather, is it true that you were fond of a lady in India, and behaved very badly to her? I should grieve to have to believe it of you, dear!" and the sweet blue eyes were fixed intently on his.

He started, and turned very pale.

"Has she dared to say that?" he cried, sharply, as though the girl had struck him.

"That I cannot tell you," she answered, gravely, "but it is for you to disprove it. You have promised to tell me the truth. I am ready to listen," and she gently stroked one of the withered hands.

There was a long struggle, a long pause.

"Must I speak of it after all these years? I buried it all then, as I believed. Must I unearth it again?"

"Yes! Godfather, you must, for the sake of your own honour, and for the sake of the friends who love you. I am one of them, and I must know the truth. Were you very cruel to a trusting woman?"

"Good Heaven! who has dared set such a scandal rolling? No, a thousand times, no. It is she who has deceived me—and made my life a torture! I do not pretend not to know of whom you speak, but I had hoped that, for her own sake, she would have been silent. She swore to me that neither in life or death would she reveal our secret; but she is doing worse, far worse, to make out that I have wronged her. I have ever been faithful to her since the first hour we met. The treachery has been here, and hers only. She must know it, and yet she dares tarnish my name!" he cried, fiercely. "I will settle with her for this. She has driven me too far, to thus turn away my only friends, after having alienated the one relation I loved. Yes, I did care for Frank, child, and that was the reason why I so much wished him to marry you; but like every other hope of mine, it has been blighted. Now, I trust that you will take to Godfrey, my real heir. He seems to be a very honest fellow, with only his poverty against him."

"He is honest as the day, godfather, and there is nothing against him," she replied, with glowing cheeks. "But we must not talk of him at present; only satisfy me that you deserve my love, and I will do whatever you wish."

"What, you will marry Godfrey, and become my niece, and bear my name?" he inquired, eagerly.

"Godfrey has asked me to do so," she returned, trying to keep back the happy smiles which came rippling to her lips. "And if you can clear up this old story—"

She broke off suddenly, and let her eyes rest upon his.

There was another long pause, then he clasped her hand tightly and began,—

"If you consider my wishes I must attend to yours, my child. Yes! marry Godfrey. You will be happy with him. You shall not regret it. As to Frank—"

"We will talk of him another time. The story of your life—"

"The story of my life I meant to die with me, Marie. But here it is. You have ever

had your own way with your poor old godfather, you small, persistent girl!

"Some twenty-three years ago I knew, for the first time, what love was—nay, it is twenty-four. She was then sixteen. Now she is forty, but scarcely less beautiful than she was as a girl."

"We met near Bombay. She was then as poor as the proverbial church mouse, and living in a tiny bungalow with an elder brother, who was a clerk to rich Mr. Fitz-Herbert, the yellow-faced Croesus of Bombay. It was well known that the wealthy old man admired her, nay, folks asserted that he had proposed to her, and had been rejected."

"One way or the other she made fun of him to me, to lead me on, perhaps, till all the power of my soul went out to meet hers."

"I suppose she was too young to know what real love was, although she acted her part well, I must confess. Anyhow, I loved her with all the strength of my matured manhood."

"The Cholmondeleys were of good family, and Geraldine was especially proud of her pedigree. Her father had married against the wishes of his parents, and had been disinherited. He had gone to India to undertake an appointment in the Civil Service, and he and his wife died untimely, leaving their son and daughter in far from good circumstances."

"From childhood Mr. Fitz-Herbert had taken to Geraldine Cholmondeley, and had greatly helped them, taking her brother into his office at an unusually early age."

"I became engaged to Geraldine, and was happy in my fool's paradise for three whole months. My work took up my days, but the evenings were my own. I spent them with Geraldine."

"I shall never forget that scene. We usually met in the garden, where it was her wont to sit, under the starlit heavens. She was waiting for me there that night, but she did not come one step to meet me."

"She was standing, dressed in a very beautiful costume of white satin. I was surprised to see her so attired, but I said nothing for the moment, for she looked so beautiful that I could speak of nothing else. She was as white as marble, and her great eyes shone like twin stars."

"My darling," I murmured, 'how lovely you look!' and I advanced to take her in the arms where she had so often rested, but she started from me with her hands outstretched."

"No, no, Godfrey," she cried, 'do not touch me! Do you not know? Has no one told you? Oh! do you not see? Look, look at this!' and she pointed to her dress, where orange blossoms nestled upon her breast. 'I could not go without seeing you once more, but I dare not stay. I shall be missed. Oh! my dear, the sweet dream is over—over for ever!' she clung to my hand for a brief moment, and was gone."

"Yes! Geraldine Cholmondeley had laughed at rich, yellow-faced Mr. Fitz-Herbert, but she had married him. She had promised me all her love, and I was deserted. I stood there alone, an embittered man. I cursed her for her faithlessness, and the hour when we had met."

"Her brother came whistling down the garden, and, bidding me good-bye, he told me that he was 'going home' at once, although he had been born in India, and had lived there all his life. He died a few months after, so I heard, so that was our last good-bye."

"After that men said that I was altered. Can you wonder, child? But to go on with my story. I left Bombay. I could not stay there and meet Geraldine. When we did meet again she was a widow—and—and—"

"You forgave her? You dear old godfather!"

"Yes, Marie, I forgave her, and my fool's paradise began again! Great Heaven! how an unprincipled woman can destroy a man!"

"We had a beautiful home in Cashmere. I had left work for her sake, to enjoy her society."

We were married, and retired to it for quiet and rest, for I had worked like a horse to drown care."

"She was a recent widow. Her husband had barely been dead a year; so we settled to keep our marriage a secret for a little time. We could count our honeymoon by weeks when it ended."

"One evening I missed my wife; and going in search of her, I found her amid the shrubs in the garden, in the arms of a man, and I saw him—yes, I saw him kiss her."

"They parted when they heard my footstep. He fled, she faced me. She looked just as she had done that night when she came to tell me that she was married to another—beautiful, proud, and cold."

"Oh, Heaven! what we said each to the other that night! Our words will stand now repeating! I accused her of having disgraced my name and honour. Her cold scorn scathed me."

"I told her how bitterly I regretted that I had ever forgiven her, and made her my wife. I think I could have killed her there with that scornful smile upon her false lips! The stars were not less bright than her luminous eyes."

"I thoroughly agree with you!" she said. 'It would have been better had we not married! best of all if we had never met at all! But I will do all I can. No one knows of our marriage—no one ever shall know of it from me! I give you your freedom! I give you back your name! I will not dishonour that, rest assured, for none shall ever know that I have borne it! Living or dying I will keep the secret! This is the last time I will listen to your insults!'

"She stood tall and proud in the twilight, turned and gave one glance at the house which had been her home, one at the broad, starlit heavens, and vanished down the path by which her lover had left her."

"Of course, she followed him: I let her go—she was not worthy!"

"I returned to England. No doubt you know what men said of me: I prayed Heaven that I might never see her again! For many years I was heard; but we met here in this very house."

"Marie, I had drilled myself into almost forgetfulness; but since that night I have had no peace; and now Frank asks me to accept that woman's daughter as his wife!"

"Can it be expected of me, child? Could I—could I give my consent to such a union?" He dropped his head upon his hands.

"Godfather," whispered the girl, "how you must have suffered! I am very, very sorry for you! and I will marry Godfrey if you wish it?"

"I do wish it, my dear! I shall then see your bright face at the old Castle," he said, eagerly.

"Yes, very often, godfather! Thank you so much for having told me your story! No, I don't blame you. Still, somehow, I believe—yes, I do believe—that there was some mistake; and that your beautiful wife was innocent!"

"Innocent!" he returned, scornfully. "Would to Heaven I could think so too! but it is impossible!"

"Had I been you, dear godfather," said the girl, softly, "I should not have been angry with her; but I would have taken her in my arms, and asked her to tell me her trouble, and she would have loved you for your goodness!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"FRANK," CRIED GERALDINE, "THAT FACE AGAIN!"

We left Frank Stanley and his cousin Godfrey on their way to Harlington Rectory, and very good friends they had become.

Now that their views on the affairs of their hearts were known to each other a thorough understanding and fellowship had begun between them, which was likely to prove a lasting one.

They chatted pleasantly as they drove along, and reached Mr. Bramley's house in the best of spirits.

Knowing of Lady Marie's wish to carry out her little plot of trying to unearth Sir Godfrey's secret by a pretended knowledge of his affairs, Godfrey remained on at the Rectory, playing chess with Mr. Bramley, while Geraldine was in another room with Frank, talking and making love, as young people under their circumstances are wont to do, and he only left just in time to get home to dinner, after darkness had set in. Still, it was not unpleasant darkness, for the queen of night had arisen, and shone with a soft, white light, and the stars were lazily winking overhead as he took his solitary drive back to the Towers.

Just after he passed the Priory he heard the sound of a shot being fired, but it did not strike him as a matter of any grave importance. It passed through his mind that some one, who had been out shooting, was discharging his fowling-piece before taking it indoors, and he considered the matter no more.

The first gong was sounding at the Towers, as he drove into the stable yard, where he left the trap, to save time, instead of going up the drive, and waiting for the groom.

He ran into the drawing room to see Lady Marie, and then in haste upstairs to dress, but not before he had kissed her, and heard her quickly whispered words, as she said, wickedly,—

"Godfrey, dear, you will be pleased to hear I have accepted you on purpose to satisfy my godfather! It has all been settled this afternoon, and I have made him tell me the secret of his life, and as you know all mine, his must be included! Will you be surprised to hear that he is married, and that Mrs. Fitz-Herbert is not Mrs. Fitz-Herbert at all, but Lady Hamilton? My dear, we must try and help these two people against themselves. They are their own enemies—proud, arrogant, hot-tempered, and unforgiving; but Christmas is at hand. We must see what can be done. Go and dress now, dear, or you will be late, and unpunctuality is a deadly sin in the mind of Sir Godfrey," saying which she dismissed him affectionately.

"His wife!" muttered the young man to himself, as he slipped into his evening clothes. "Well, I certainly did not expect that. Why should he be so awfully down upon his step-daughter? Well, I suppose we shall hear some day. As the frozen fountain has begun to drip, we shall see the full stream by-and-by."

They were all assembled in the drawing-room when Godfrey entered, but he was not too late, and he was warmly received by his uncle, who lost no time in linking the hands of the two young people together, and giving them his blessing.

"I have always very greatly disliked the idea of being laid aside for others to wear my shoes," he said; "but the thought that my little pet, Marie, will reign in the old home, and will benefit by my taking myself out of the way is a great comfort to me, and softens the unpleasant reflection. That independent young rascal declines to accept my money," he chuckled; "but he cannot prevent what I shall do for his wife. It is only right I should look after my goddaughter, having no child of my own!"

The noise of the great gong prevented his words being distinctly heard, but Marie caught them, nevertheless; and we cannot do better than leave them happily assembled around the dinner table at the Towers, without the faintest prescience that a dark and terrible cloud was already rolling heavily across their horizon, and ready to overcast all their brightness.

Geraldine sat alone when Lord Northby left her. It was no matter of feeling with her which caused her to let her work lie idly in her lap. She was not in the least sorry

for him. He had been kind to her, but she saw that had she wedded him it would have been a matter of arrangement, not of love, and she felt that any other woman would do to fill the position as well as herself, if only she were sufficiently good-looking to be an ornament to his establishment.

She was obliged to get out Frank's letter, and read it again, before she could get back to the feeling of belief and trustfulness which she had felt before listening to the theories propounded by this man of the world; but the happy look soon returned to her sweet face, and the warmth to her heart, as she read the loving words of the man to whom she was pledged. But again her happiness was broken into by her mother.

"Geraldine," she said, reproachfully, "how can you throw away such a chance as Lord Northby offers you? Take my word for it, love brings no happiness, but rather misery in its train. I ought to know, for I have loved and suffered too. Believe me, you are best without it! I am sure you would be happy as his wife, and he would be a protector to us both!"

"But I know I should not!" answered the girl, impatiently. "As to protection, we need none."

"You do not know everything, Geraldine, and I cannot tell you; but Sir Godfrey Hamilton is, I hear, coming back to the Towers, so I must go away. I will not run the risk of meeting him again."

"Mamma," said the girl, impressively, "why should you be afraid of that old man? What harm can he possibly do you?"

"That is my secret!" she answered, coldly. "Geraldine, do not seek to pry into it!"

The door opened, and the butler announced "Captain De Lacy."

Geraldine started up with a half-smothered cry, but at a sign from her mother she sank back again into her chair, and the Captain advanced into the room.

There was an unusual decision in his manner, a strange brightness in his eyes, which the girl had never seen in them—an actually cruel light.

He caught Geraldine by the hand; but she withdrew it from his clasp with an absolute shiver.

Mrs. Fitz-Herbert rose to leave the room, but her daughter laid hold of her skirt, and clung to her.

"Mother, do not go!" she cried, urgently. "I think Captain De Lacy's visit is to you, dear, and not to me. I promised him an answer before Christmas."

"And he shall have it if only you will stay!" she answered, feverishly.

Mrs. Fitz-Herbert looked at the Captain.

"Certainly!" he said, politely. "Miss Fitz-Herbert's wishes are my law. You know what I have to say to her? Pray remain."

Then he turned to Geraldine.

"Miss Fitz-Herbert," he said, as he stood and firmly grasped the back of a chair, "I am most sorry for the way I behaved to you in India. It was cowardly that I did not stand by you—very. But my father was a stern man, and I knew that to oppose him meant utter ruin to me in life."

"I will not attempt to cover my fault, but only to thus explain it. I have regretted it ever since, and the moment I was free I came to you immediately. You loved me once, and in those sweet, bygone days, you used to tell me that I was the love of your life. Women have forgiven worse wrongs than mine against you. Can you not forgive? I never took part with my father in his conduct towards you, and it was his meddling old lawyer who made all the mischief—interfering old rascal! As for myself, all I want is your love. If Mrs. Fitz-Herbert has a secret, and likes to keep it, I shall ask no questions. She is willing to take me back again if only you will do so. Forgive me, and be my wife!"

"No, Captain De Lacy," said Geraldine, bravely, as she regarded him with cold scorn, "I never loved you. I loved an ideal man,

one who was loyal and true. I thought you such a one, and found you were not. It is not a matter of forgiveness. I know you now as you are, and nothing could ever make me believe in you any more.

"Like water spilt upon the plain,
Not to be gathered up again,
Is the old love I bore."

"Geraldine, think before you drive me too far!" he cried, in a low, harsh voice.

She looked up at him, and a cold shudder ran through her.

That face at the window! It was just like that!

She rose, her knees trembled under her, but she remained outwardly calm.

"Excuse me," she murmured; "it is useless to keep up this interview. My conduct should have told you long since what my lips now do. I actually despise you—first, your unmanly desertion, and now your still more unworthy persecution!"

"No doubt you think that you will marry your new lover and be happy, but mark my word, you will never be his wife!" And a fierce, grating laugh broke from his lips as the unholy fire flashed from his eyes.

They transfixed her. There was a horrible fascination in them. She gazed at him in speechless terror; then she fled with a soft, low cry, like a wounded deer, and he stood looking after her, and saw her run hatless down the drive.

"Where has she gone?" he asked at length.

"To the Rectory, no doubt. Captain De Lacy, you had no right to terrify her like that, and I see now that she was right to refuse you. I never dreamed you could act in such a manner. I thought you really loved her, and were sorry for your sin against her. I regret that I ever urged her to accept you. You have abused my confidence in you a second time—that is enough!"

"Who is at the Rectory?" he asked, suddenly.

"How should I know?" replied Mrs. Fitz-Herbert. "Captain De Lacy, our interview is over," and she rose and laid her hand upon the bell.

He might not have heard her words for all the notice he took of them.

The butler entered.

"Please show Captain De Lacy out," she said, with studied indifference.

As the meaning of the servant's presence came to him, he turned and gave his hostess a look of defiance, then made towards the door, out of the house, and down the drive.

The dog cart from the Towers turned in at the Rectory gate, and he saw Frank Stanley. A cart passed down the road. He jumped into it, and paid the owner to drive him back to Sir Jasper Ferndale's, and to leave him there.

The Baronet was out. Everything was in his favour. He went to his own room, and unlocking his portmanteau, put something into his pocket. Then he flung his belongings into the trunk, locked it, and went to the stable.

"I have received a sudden call to town," he said to the groom. "Drive me to the station as quickly as ever you can, there's a good fellow."

And with his own hands he hastened the operation of harnessing, left a message for Sir Jasper, and was away.

He drove to a station not a mile from Harlington, and arrived there as the up-train was signalled.

"You're just in time, sir," said the man, and giving him a tip, Captain De Lacy seized his own portmanteau, and carried it into the station.

And Sir Jasper Ferndale's groom went back perfectly satisfied that the Captain was upon his way to London; but, instead, he had a whispered conference with the guard. There was the flash of gold, and the portmanteau started Londonward without the Captain.

When the train was out of sight he went down a side path out of the station, which was a short cut to Harlington, and walked with a white, set face, and evil, gleaming eyes, and long, quick strides, till he once more stood at the Rectory gate.

Darkness was closing in upon the earth, and under its cover he entered there. He skirted the shrubs, hiding behind them as he went.

He came up to the house, and looked in at a window. Mr. Bramley and Captain Hamilton were in the room playing chess. He was not seeking them.

He stooped and crept on to another window, and again looked in. A bright fire glowed upon the hearth, throwing a warm, pleasant light about the room, and Geraldine and Frank Stanley sat before it hand in hand.

Her sweet face was illuminated with the brightness of real joy and contentment, and he was gazing at her with ineffable love marked upon all his features, and looking out from his honest blue eyes.

Cyril De Laury ground his teeth with fierce fury. The very demon of hatred seemed let loose in those glittering eyes.

"She shall never be his wife!" he hissed, as his hand crept to his pocket stealthily.

As though some sudden influence drew her, Geraldine uttered a low cry,—

"Frank," she said, "that face again!" but no face was there.

(To be continued.)

ELLA'S LOVE MATCH.

—O—

Any one who visited Mr. Hopwood at his fine place on the Medway would be sure to notice, after a while, an old man who wandered about the place dressed in summer in a white shirt and linen vest and trousers and a fisherman's hat, and in winter in a woollen dressing-gown. He was a meek, tall, bald old man, and people at first took him for a superannuated old servant; but, finally, his nice linen, his neat hands, and a certain, well-bred tone of voice, if, by chance, they heard him speak, made them ask,—

"Who is that?"

If they inquired of Miss Helen, the eldest unmarried daughter, she would answer,—

"An old connection of poor mamma's. I can't see why pa has him here—horrid thing!"

If they asked Mr. Hopwood's maiden sister, she would reply,—

"One of the blessings my late sister-in-law brought with her into the family. A miserable ne'er-do-weel of a relation."

If the question was propounded to the pompous master of the house, as he sat in his armchair by the fire, or drove about his property, would answer,—

"Well, that's a sort of relation of my wife's, a ne'er-do-weel. The black sheep of the flock, you know. Always is one in every family. For her sake—she was a very benevolent woman—we let him stay about. He prefers eating by himself. He's very stupid, very; but she wanted him here, and she had her way, poor soul. I grudge her nothing. Yes, that's poor Ned."

But if it was Miss Ella of whom the question was asked, she always answered,—

"Why, that is Uncle Ned. He's a little eccentric, but the dearest old soul. I'm very, very fond of him, and he of me. Dear old Uncle Ned."

Certainly Ella was the old man's only friend in that pompous household. She it was who went up to his little room with his meals, and sat with him while he ate them; who saw that he had the newspaper and his pipe; who had fixed that little out-of-the-way place with a pretty carpet, book shelves, a student's lamp, lots of pretty ornaments in worsted and painted silk; who never received

her monthly allowance without buying something for him.

His snow-white shirts were her gift, and she saw that they were "done up" properly. The flannel dressing-gown he wore in winter was of her contrivance. In fact, up in that dormer-roofed room, there were hours that were more home-like than any spent in the great parlours or the big dining-room, where Miss Helen was only affectionate to "pa" when she wanted him to give her more money to spend; and Miss Hopwood, the elder sister of the master of the house, made bitter speeches in the pauses of the needle-work in which she was perpetually engaged. Sometimes directed at her brother, sometimes at Helen, sometimes at Ella, but all worded so circumspectly and clothed in such a guise of piety that no one dared resent them.

"What a comfort you are, Uncle Ned," Ella would say, as she poured out the old man's coffee.

"And what a comfort you are, Ella," Uncle Ned would say. "If I was a rich uncle, just home from India, like those in plays and novels, you couldn't make more of me."

"I shouldn't make so much, uncle," Ella would answer, "for you'd be a victim of liver complaint, and that would make you ill-natured, and you'd scold me, and say naughty words. They all do, you know. Now you haven't any money or stocks to worry about, like poor pa; and you're not irritable, and I like to be with you. You're like mamma, too. You have her eyes."

"You are sister Mary's image," the old man would say. Do you remember the day that you came to the hospital with her?"

"Yes," said Ella. "I was just twelve years old and mamma was crying over the telegram. 'My only brother, Ella,' she said. 'So ill that he may die, and so poor that he's in a hospital.' Then we came and I saw you in bed, and after a while we brought you home, and ma nursed you well again."

"And died herself, just as I got about," said Uncle Ned. "And your father and the rest did not like a shabby old man around the house. Well, I was lucky to get a home I suppose, and luckier still to find such disinterested love as yours. You're like Mary. She was the dearest girl that ever lived. Yes, you're like Mary."

But they did not always talk thus. They were very busy often, over books; over Ella's embroidery, for which he designed patterns; teaching her little dog a thousand tricks; feeding the blind kittens she had saved from drowning; making a little well from which the canary drew buckets of water. And Ella and the old man would wander off to the river side, where he would fish, seldom catching anything, and she would read or knit.

None of the family knew of these intimacies. Helen, older than Ella by six years, preferred that she should consider herself a child until her elder sister was married. And Aunt Anne detested her for her resemblance to the sister-in-law who "had never been congenial."

No one in the house knew, but some one not of the household did, and shared at times in them.

Sometimes, when the old man's rod dangled over the water, a younger angler would take his place near him—a handsome young fellow with black hair and the brightest eyes in the world; and then the hours went by like hours in a dream, and Ella felt happy as she had felt when a child by her mother's side. And Uncle Ned laughed and told fishermen's stories. As for the young man, silent or talkative, he was always charming. So thought Ella. She was seventeen; she had never had a lover. She was well-read in romantic lore. What happened was only to be expected. In a little while two lovers sat beside old Uncle Ned on the banks of the pretty stream, and walked together as far as the little gate in the hedge that nobody else used, and did not

hide from the old man that they parted with a kiss.

Leonard Best was not a fashionable man, only the son of a poor widow who had made a bookkeeper of her boy. What holidays he had he spent at home. This was his mid-summer vacation; he was bright and good and handsome, but Mr. Hopwood surely would have had other views for his youngest daughter.

And so, one day, as the two, having met accidentally on the road, were talking together, with an expression on either face, that made an old country woman, who passed them remark to her husband,—

"Joe, take my word for it, the two are courting."

Mr. Hopwood marched up behind the pair, and appeared like a very florid ghost between them, with an,—

"I was not aware, Mr. Best, that you had ever been introduced to my daughter."

The young man blushed, but answered,—

"But I have sir—by my friend, her uncle."

"Oh!" replied Mr. Hopwood, lowering his tone a little, "then you know my brother, Mr. Alfred Hopwood, in the city? He is a relative I am proud of—worth thousands."

"I have often heard of him," replied the young man, frankly; "but have never met him. I owe my introduction to Miss Ella Hopwood to her Uncle Edward—ah—ah."

The young man suddenly remembered that he did not know Uncle Ned's last name.

"Her Uncle Edward!" repeated Mr. Hopwood. "Ella, does young Best allude to your poor mother's unfortunate brother Ned?"

Ella bowed her head.

"Mr. Best!" repeated Mr. Hopwood. "That person has no authority to introduce my daughter. Consider yourself a stranger to her henceforth!"

Ella looked at Leonard. Leonard looked at Ella.

"It is too late, sir," the latter said. "I love your daughter, and have won her heart. She has promised to be my wife!"

Mr. Hopwood stared at him, lifted his eyebrows; stared again through his double eye-glasses, and spoke sternly,—

"I have one daughter who is a credit to me. Lord Trent paid great attention to her last winter. He has written to ask my consent to their nuptials, which I shall give, and he will return in fall to be married to her. A nobleman would hardly like a brother-in-law who makes, perhaps, five pounds a week. My eldest daughter has married a gentleman who is esteemed the wealthiest man in Rochester. My son is with my brother in London—a man I am proud of. Now I shall never make a fuss about Ella. I only tell you this: If she marries you, I disown her. You can take her if she chooses. I shall never give her a penny. She may have her clothes and trinkets, and go. If she obeys me, she shall be, married or single, well provided for. She is plain and unprepossessing; but I know a young clergyman who will attain eminence, who only needs my permission to propose. She might do very well with a proper portion for him. She has a thick waist, a large mouth, and ordinary features," continued Mr. Hopwood, turning his eye glass on his daughter; "but a clergyman should net look for beauty."

"She is the prettiest girl I know, and if I may earn her bread and butter, I can do it," said Leonard Best. "You give her to me, sir?"

"No," replied Mr. Hopwood. "She may give herself to you if she chooses to be a beggar."

Then he walked away. As Ella and Leonard stood looking at each other, old Uncle Ned's head arose above the shrubbery.

"I give my permission," he said, with more than usual dignity; "and I am her mother's brother. I think you will make her happy, Mr. Best."

The maiden aunt and the sister, who was

to be the bride of a nobleman, led Ella a sad life of it for a while; but one morning she walked out of her home in her simple church-going costume, and was married in the little church of St. John. Old Uncle Ned, in his old-fashioned broadcloth suit, went with them, and gave the bride away.

Mrs. Best was there, and a school-friend of Ella's, and a fellow-clerk of Leonard's. None of the Hopwood family. And after the wedding they were to go upon a little trip. Ella's trunks had been sent to Leonard's mother's little home. The bride was not as happy as she might have been under other circumstances, but at home no one had ever loved or considered her since her mother's death; and Leonard loved her, and she loved him. Her only trouble was that she must leave old Uncle Ned.

"That is hard," the old man said, "very hard, Ella." And then Leonard held out his hand.

"Uncle Ned," he said, "we shall live in a very plain way, but if you will live with us, we will do our best to make you happy, and shall be happy ourselves."

"Will you?" cried Uncle Ned. "A poor old man like me—oh! really?"

"Really!" cried Ella, dancing with joy.

"Really and truly, Heaven knows!" And Leonard grasped his hand and shook it. "You brought us together, Uncle Ned," he said.

"It's lucky," answered the old man, "for brother-in-law Hopwood has turned me out of his house for aiding and abetting you—told me that I might go to the workhouse if I liked. I didn't like, but I just said, 'Very well; I'll go.'"

"I'll get your things and take them to mother's," said Leonard. "You'll be company for her while we're gone; after that, one home for all of us."

Then the old man looked at them with a smile; looked at Mrs. Best with another, and laughed his sweet, good-natured laugh.

"You're two good, honest, generous children," he said. "And you're Leonard's mother, ma'am. But I've an explanation to make. Five years ago, my sister Mary heard that I was ill, and at a hospital, and took me to her house. She nursed me back to tolerable health, and was very good to me. Then, sweet angel, she died. She thought that being in a hospital meant poverty. I was paying five pounds a week there. I have a fortune that even Mr. Hopwood would respect, but seeing what he was, I took a fancy that I'd find out what his children were. I have. I've lived about the place as old Uncle Ned, a poor relation. I wasn't wanted, even at table. I was despised by all but Ella. She, dear little soul, has been a daughter to me. I told my sister Mary the truth on her death-bed, and promised to do my best by this sweet girl; and my money has been growing under good care for five years. Why, had I been the beggar they thought me, I'd have gone to the workhouse rather than eat Hopwood's bread all these years. As it was, I enjoyed the joke. To think how he would have respected me if he had known the truth. How he scorned me for being poor, when I was a wealthy man; but let all that pass; we are happy together and what need we care?"

There was great excitement at the Hopwood mansion when the news reached its inhabitants, and its master sent a formal forgiveness to his daughter.

She was a good girl and felt glad that this was so, but she only began to know what real happiness was in the home where she and those who truly loved her lived contentedly together for many long and pleasant years.

THERE is talk in France of utilising water courses as a railway motive power. It is proposed that the track shall be laid on an embankment in the middle of the current, and that the locomotives shall have two paddle-wheels dipping into the water and revolved by it.

A CRUEL SILENCE.

—:—

CHAPTER XXI.

THE last day of the old year came on a Saturday, as all those whose memory can stretch back to 1887 will remember.

Abraham Newton was accustomed to go to the Crystal Palace every Saturday, and rarely returned much before the hour fixed for his late dinner; but on this particular afternoon he was less pleased than usual with the entertainment provided, or else he was anxious about Ivy; and so, before the performance of the grand pantomime was over, he suggested to Mrs. Morton they should go home, and the dear old lady, who always fell in with her friends' wishes, consenting at once, declaring she was sure the dear child must be lonely without them.

They had been away little more than three hours, and yet the mischief was done which it would take infinite trouble and suffering to repair.

Jane met them with a bewildered face. There had been a lady, she said, asking for the master, and, as he was out, she insisted on seeing Miss Ivy.

They seemed to talk very earnestly for about an hour; then they both went out, and the lady said she would return again at seven o'clock.

Mrs. Martin was punctual to her appointment, and she brought forward such proofs of her identity that the Anglo Indian could not doubt she was his brother's daughter.

There was no anger in her tone now when she spoke of Ivy—only a deep, womanly pity as she told her own conviction that the poor girl, though not her child, was in very truth the Miss Martins' niece—the infant bequeathed to their care by their beautiful half-sister, Dora!

"She never cared for money," said Mr. Newton, cheerfully; "and I am richer, perhaps, than you think for, Katharine. I won't wrong you or your children, but I shall be able to give my little girl the dowry I promised her; and she is going to marry a young fellow so devoted to her, he'd not mind if she came to him without a penny of her own!"

"She can never marry him now," said Katharine Martin, sadly. "Don't you understand? She is Kenneth Chetwynd's daughter, and it was Lord Rossmoor whom he robbed."

"That might have parted them three months ago," returned Mr. Newton, with unabated cheerfulness, "but it won't matter now. Kenneth Chetwynd's innocence was discovered this autumn. All the papers were full of it; and Lord Rossmoor told me with his own lips he should never forgive himself for his share in the mistake. Depend upon it, he will be delighted when he knows Ivy is Mr. Chetwynd's child, since by affection to her he may atone for his injustice to her father."

Mrs. Martin wrung her hands.

"I did not know it," she said, sorrowfully. "It must have been in the papers that came to Sydney after I left. I told her she was a convict's child, and that the man her father robbed was Lord Rossmoor."

"Ivy never reads the papers," said Mrs. Morton, gravely, "so she would have no idea you were mistaken. But, though she must have suffered cruelly, we can soon reassure her. Where did you leave her, Mrs. Martin?"

"Is she not here?"

"No. The servant said she left the house with you."

"So she did," admitted Mrs. Martin, promptly. "She went to the church in the next street—the bell was going for service. I might have gone in with her, only I saw she wanted to be alone. Do you mean she has not come home?"

Mr. Newton shivered.

"She must have met with an accident!"

"She has run away!" he said, sadly.

"She knew Lord Keith's pride in his family

honour. She would not let him bring a shadow on his name by sharing it with her. The child could not trust herself to give him up if she heard his loving words, and so she has run away. Heaven grant we may find her before grief and privation kill her!"

Mrs. Martin looked almost as grieved as her uncle.

"I came over to England at my husband's wish," she said, simply. "From the advertisement he said you must be seeking me, uncle, but I had no thought of injuring this poor child. I was angry with her at first, thinking she had stolen my little one's name and place, but when I heard her story I felt only sorrow. I shall wish I had never left the colony if I have brought trouble on her!"

But the Indian merchant, dearly as he had grown to love Ivy, had yet an innate sense of justice. He could not blame Katharine Martin for what had happened.

"It was not your fault," he said, kindly.

"The sin lies at the door of those two women who deceived the poor girl all these years as to her parentage, and then finished the evil deed by introducing her to me as your child! For all her life they had kept a cruel silence about her parents. They ought to have kept it to the end, and not have come to me with such a fraud!"

Mrs. Morton interposed.

"I have heard Ivy say that the younger of the two Miss Martins was very much against her coming to you, and told her he had better earn her living even by plain needlework. I suppose she had some scruples about the deceit."

"Never mind the deceit," said the motherly Mrs. Martin. "Let's bury all our anger about that, and just fix our thoughts on finding Ivy. Poor little thing! If any harm comes to her I shall always feel it is my fault!"

"We have only to find her," said Mr. Newton, hopefully. "A very few words will put all her fears to rest. She will believe me that her father's name is cleared now, and no one feels anything but intense pity for his unmerited suffering."

"But how are we to find her?" demanded Mrs. Martin, who was of a very brisk character. "I've heard there are nearly four million people in London! Looking for a girl among them will be difficult unless you have some clue."

Mr. Newton thought a few moments.

"It is worse than I feared, for I can't remember hearing her speak of any friends except the Tregarthans; and as their son married Keith's sister, they are the last people she would go to, I should say."

"Shall you tell him?" asked Katharine.

"Who?"

"Lord Keith, The gentleman she's going to marry."

"I shall wait till Tuesday," said poor Mr. Newton, sadly. "That will give us three clear days; and, if I hear nothing then, I am afraid I shall be obliged to write to him. Poor children, they were to have been married on the tenth of January!"

Sunday passed in sorrow and suspense at the Maisonette; but Monday brought a ray of hope, a tiny note from Ivy to her kind old uncle, telling him—what they had all felt—she had gone away because she could not trust her courage if it came to a last meeting with her lover.

"He is so good and generous," wrote the poor child. "I know he would keep his promise, and marry me in spite of all; but he must not, shall not, make such a sacrifice. It would break Lord Rossmoor's heart to think that his son's wife was the child of a convict. Tell Keith everything, dear Mr. Newton—I must not call you uncle any more—tell him I never loved him better than I do now I must give him up, but that I cannot let him blight his future for my sake. You have your own niece now, dear Mr. Newton, and you will have her children too; but I think you will still spare a little corner of your heart for me, and, someday, when Harold has forgotten me,

and is happy with someone else, I shall creep back just to see you, and hear you forgive the deception which, though I never knew it, was yet worked on you by means of

"Ivy."

There was no address, but the postmark was London, S.W., and Mrs. Morton who was far more practical than the old Indian merchant, said that if Ivy was still in London she would be sure to look at the advertisements, as she must try to find a situation. If they put in a notice headed, "Dalbury," or "Ivy," she would be sure to see it. They had only to persevere.

Mr. Newton felt consoled by this view of the case, and took up his second letter which bore the coronet of Rossmoor.

"DEAR SIR,—

"My son has the most painful news to break to you. Will you call on him at my hotel, if possible, this morning? Try and keep this letter and its contents from your niece. Yours ever faithfully,

"ROSSMOOR."

"Troubles never come alone," cried poor Mr. Newton. "What can be the matter now?" He was soon to know. Eleven o'clock found him at the Charing Cross Hotel in Lord Rossmoor's private sitting-room. Keith rose to meet him, his face white with anguish.

"You will think me a dishonourable scoundrel!" he said, brokenly, "but indeed, I never suspected this! I saw my wife's funeral, I talked to the doctor who had attended her, I heard from her mother of her great sufferings. How could I imagine those two women would be friends enough to pass off their dead daughter and sister as the creature the law called my wife?"

Mr. Newton listened to the story in deep sympathy.

"You are quite sure," he suggested, gravely. "You don't think you are deceived now by a cleverly got up fraud or even a strong resemblance?"

"No, there was no resemblance between the sisters; besides, I find she had been writing to one of my servants, offering bribes for news of my plans! Do you know she went down to the Abbey on Saturday, announced herself as 'Lady Keith,' and declared she should await my arrival?"

"What a terrible experience for you?"

"Aye. Fortunately the Abbey is my father's house. I have no authority there save as his guest. He speedily told her as much, and dismissed her; but she is staying at the chief hotel in Westerton as 'Lady Keith,' and she says she intends to bring an action to make me acknowledge her as my wife!"

"Why did she try to persuade you she was dead? I can see no object for such a step!"

Harold shook his head wearily.

"She had never been told my true rank. She knew me only as 'Mr. Harold.' I suppose she discovered my true name by accident, and determined to assert her right to it. If she had suffered me to commit," he hesitated and then continued, "bigamy, I suppose she thought she could make better terms. It seems she meant to go that length! She says so herself, but she had quarrelled with her mother, and feared she would betray her!"

Mr. Newton looked at Harold with the deepest pity.

"She must be without one grain of womanly feeling!"

"She is an utterly reckless adventuress!" said Keith, bitterly. "I bore my burden in silence three years, and even then it seemed beyond my strength. Think of my misery now! The exposure has nearly broken my father's heart, while I dare not think of Ivy, my little Ivy! my gentle darling, to whom I have done such a grievous wrong!"

"Ivy will never blame you!"

Harold paced the room impatiently.

"Think of it. We love each other with all our strength. My father and mother approved

my choice. You had given your consent. I felt as though, with that sweet companion at my side, I should be strong for every duty; and she clung to me with all her heart, and now this other shadowy tie must part us!"

"Can nothing be done? Wouldn't the fact of this woman's pretending to be dead help to free you from her?"

Harold shook his head.

"You see I can bring no proof against her. It was the mother who instructed the doctor and the undertaker—the mother who described the dying woman throughout her illness as 'Mrs. Harold'—the mother, finally, who saw me, and told me my wife was dead. Of course, I know it was all done by her connivance, but I can't prove it."

"What is to be done?"

"My father has gone down to Cornwall to break the terrible news to my mother and Isabelle. He advised that as soon as I had seen you I should start on a long foreign tour, and leave our lawyer to come to some settlement with my wife."

"Sensible advice!"

"But I must see Ivy first." There was no mistaking the passionate love shining in Lord Keith's eyes. "If we are to be parted for all time; if we can never be all in all to each other, at least I claim it as a right to tell her the miserable truth myself."

Mr. Newton hesitated.

Keith expected a refusal, and went on eagerly,—

"You have been so good to her. You love her almost as your own child. I can leave her in your care with every confidence, but I must see her first. I cannot go away and let her think me false. Heaven knows I would give years of my life to be able to marry her, and that I look on her and on no other as my wife."

"My dear boy!" said the old man, kindly wiping his eyes, for Keith had touched him deeply. "You should see her willingly, but she is not at Sydenham. I, too, have been in trouble since you went away," and then he told the story of Saturday afternoon, and put Ivy's tear-stained note into her lover's hands.

"I was seeking her," went on Abraham Newton, "and I meant to tell her this news would make no difference to your wishes. I felt that all Westerton, so far from looking down on her, would honour the child of their old fellow-townsmen, who suffered so unjustly. It seemed to me that every one who had read the recent statements in the newspapers must look on it as a title of honour to be Kenneth Chetwynd's daughter."

"My poor father!" came from Keith, with something like a groan. "Already he looks on himself as having injured Kenneth Chetwynd deeply by being the man who prosecuted him. It will be a bitter blow to him that through us sorrow has come to Chetwynd's child."

"I shall seek her far and near," said Mr. Newton. "She may not be my great-niece, but I love her dearly. I am going straight from you to my lawyers. I will not have Ivy dependent on the chances of my life. I shall make over twenty thousand pounds to trustees for her benefit for ever. There will be plenty left for the Martins. I am thankful I am rich enough to please myself."

"I must see her!"

"But where is she?" asked Mr. Newton, who bore with his impatience wonderfully, guessing how he was suffering. "Mrs. Morton and I have gone over all the names we ever heard her mention, and we can think of no one she would be likely to go to!"

Keith shook his head.

"Had she any money?"

"Yes, I had given her a supply that morning to go shopping, and as she felt disinclined to leave the house she would have most of it intact. I daresay she had over twenty pounds."

"It seemed hard enough when you came in," said Harold, bitterly. "I knew then I must lose her; but at last I could think of her as safe in your careful home, treated in all things as your petted child. But now—"

"I will send you news the moment I hear anything," said Mr. Newton, and then, with a warm hand-shake, he passed out.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was the time of roses. Far away in the country the meadows were filled with the fresh-out hay, and many children played amongst it in careless glee; but up in London, though it was the gayest time of the whole year for the rich and great, for other folks the great heat had fewer charms.

Even the green leaves on the trees seemed dusty and faded, the gardens were scorched, and in the little narrow courts where no flowers ever grew the people felt weak and languid from the intense heat.

Many a one from these dingy courts helped to fill the wards of a great London hospital, whose work went on just the same summer and winter. Sorrow and suffering were to be found there at all times, but the rooms were large and airy, and everything done to lessen pain.

The medical skill was of the best, and the nurses or sisters, as the older ones were called, had kind, pleasant faces, and spared no labour or trouble in trying to relieve the afflicted creatures under their care.

One of them, the Superior of them all, stood in her own sitting-room talking to a young probationer, whose quiet black dress and white apron only set off the more her excessive beauty, just as the quiet white cap set off rather than concealed the wondrous brightness of her golden hair.

"I am very sorry," the elder woman said, kindly, "I have no fault to find. We all like you, but the doctors decide you are not strong enough to adopt nursing as a profession; and, as their word is law, I have no choice but to let you leave us when the three months are up!"

"Next week?" said the young probationer, sadly. "I am very sorry. It is so quiet and peaceful here."

They were the two last adjectives the sister would have applied herself to the busy hospital, but she let them pass, and repeating a kindly word or so of regret, she dismissed Miss Chetwynd to her duties.

Poor little Ivy! She bore her own name now, and had borne it ever since a snowy morning in January—by a refinement of fate's cruelty—the very one that was to have been her wedding-day, when Mr. Newton having at last discovered her retreat, had told her her own mistake, and how her father was one who had suffered unjustly, and of whom she might be proud.

The kind old man had never had a more painful task than breaking his other news to her. She bore it better than he had dared to hope for.

"It is easier for me than when I thought the shadow on my birth parted us," she said, simply. "Don't you see, Uncle Abraham, then it was a thing that could be overcome. I was always doubting which would hurt me most, to give him up or let him share the disgrace; now it is a barrier beyond our power. I have not brought sorrow on him, for he had this burden when I first saw him. He told me then about his wife; and, do you know, I pitied her because he did not love her!"

"She does not need your pity," said Mr. Newton, hotly. "She has wrecked both your lives!"

On one point Ivy was firm, she would not see Harold. She sent him her dear love. She told him she should never think the terrible mistake his fault, but she was certain it was best they should not meet.

"When he said good-bye to me he was mine!" said the poor child, brokenly. "It was not a sin to love him and to tell him so. Now I should feel that every word I said to him was a wrong to his wife. I think, somehow, it would make him more angry with her to see how much I feel the parting. I won't

have a sad memory of him to carry always. I will cherish our happy time together, our bright good-bye in December for my last."

It was impossible to move her. Mr. Newton, in his heart, thought she was right, and brought on himself a storm of angry reproaches from Lord Keith for his refusal to give up Ivy's address.

Then Harold went abroad. Lord Rossmoor and his wife started for Cannes with the Tregarthans.

A strange calm fell on the Maisonnets, till Molly Pennington sent a loving note to Miss Chetwynd, begging her to come to stay at the bank house.

Molly pleaded the old friendship between their fathers, and how his partner had espoused Mr. Chetwynd's cause with almost a brother's warmth. Though Ivy could not be her cousin they might surely be friends!

It was the first sign of interest Ivy had shown in anything when she expressed a desire to accept this invitation. All was full of such painful memories at the Maisonnets, that she longed to escape from it, and as Mrs. Martin was staying with her uncle she would not be missed. Two days after receiving Molly's letter Ivy was on her way to Westerton.

If things had gone differently she would have arrived there a bride, yet she yearned to see the home that might have been hers, the familiar scenes where Keith's childhood had been spent, and when once she had seen Molly's face she was thankful she had come, for she felt here, indeed, was a friend she could trust.

Mr. Pennington was very kind to his dead partner's child, and very early in their acquaintance told Ivy the full amount of her father's share in the bank would be restored to her—the securities sent back with Daniel Fenn's confession amply covering the sum advanced by himself at the miserable time of his friend's conviction.

"I always liked your father, my dear," said Cornelius, simply, one night when he was alone with Ivy, Molly having been called away to see some poor pensioner. "And though we were rivals, I never bore him any ill-will. I think I would have given every shilling I had to save him from his terrible fate just for your mother's sake."

"Please tell me about her?" pleaded Ivy. "She was all that is good and pretty. You are like her, child, though to an old man's mind, not so beautiful. Poor Kenneth took me with him once when he went to Monmouth on a visit, and though I thought myself a sober old bachelor I lost my heart to her at first sight. But I could see even then how it was between them, and I said never a word of my own hopes. I didn't want her to feel when she came here a happy young wife her husband's partner was her rejected suitor!"

Ivy's eyes filled with tears. "Love seems to bring only pain," she whispered.

"But the pain love brings is better, far, than living without love. I am an old man, my dear, and I may speak my mind. The misery of life comes not from loving in vain, but from marrying without love. People say esteem and affection are sufficient. But my dear child, there's a deal of wear-and-tear in daily life, and to my mind, only love can stand against it."

Ivy put her little hand into his. "I shall never marry," she said, slowly. "Mr. Pennington, did you ever see her—Lady Keith?"

He nodded. "If there are bad women in the world—and I'm afraid there are—I should say she was an out-and-out bad specimen. Don't trouble your head about her, my dear. Harold could not have cared for her had he never seen you."

It was after a long consultation with Molly and Mr. Pennington that Ivy resolved to go into a London hospital as a probationer. She was rich. Mr. Newton's ample provision for her and her father's property would bring in

together not far short of a thousand a-year. Ivy had no need for money, but Molly and her father both agreed she sadly needed an interest in life. They would have kept her gladly in their home, but they were too near Rossmoor Abbey to make it practicable without risking a meeting with Harold Keith.

Ivy (it was her real name, for her aunts, probably having even then the idea of the deceit they afterwards practised, had called her after her little cousin) herself said she should like to be a nurse, and the only difficulty was her delicate appearance, which led to a refusal from more than one hospital.

She had only gained an entrance into the one where we find her in the following June, on the understanding she was to leave at the end of three months if the authorities thought her health not equal to the task she had undertaken.

One week, and she would be far away from this busy scene of human suffering. Only seven days, and she would be once more face to face with the question—what should she do with her life?

She was "off duty," and she sat irresolutely in her own little room thinking of the prospect. Many homes were open to her, but no one needed her. Her uncle, James Martin, was in England with his children, all settled in a roomy house at Sydenham, of which Mr. Newton was an honoured inmate. They would have welcomed her gladly, but she would have been with them, but not one of them.

Molly Pennington and her father, now home again at Brightwood, would have been more congenial; but, alas! if she lived so near the Abbey was it not reminding the Rossmoors of their son's unhappiness?

The two old aunts, discovered by Mrs. Martin's inquiries of the family lawyer, were at Worthing, enjoying religion and sea air. They had both gone in vehemently for "good works," and obstinately denied that they had acted with anything but kindness.

She was twenty-two, and she was alone in the world. All her dreams of happiness were over. Never would she be a loved wife, a joyful mother. All such thoughts were as impossible to her as though she had been a cloistered nun. To Ivy second love was not distasteful or imprudent, but simply impossible.

The clock recalled her to her duties. She was in the accident ward, and had the night watch with the sister we have already seen. It was the custom of that particular hospital that each sister should have one probationer under her instruction, and Ivy had been allotted to Sister Emily.

The ward was not so full as usual, but there were some very dangerous cases, and Ivy saw at once that a fresh patient had been added to them while she was away.

"Knocked down by a cab and run over," was the sister's whispered comment. "If she recovers consciousness try and get her name and the address of her friends. We could find no clue."

It was not an attractive face. It was bold and hard. There was a smell of spirits about the woman which suggested that drink had contributed to the accident. She was probably under forty, but there was a reckless world-worn expression on her face, as though she had lived a fast, dissipated life.

It was at midnight that she opened her eyes—large, bold black eyes, which struck Ivy with a sense of fear. She looked slowly round the ward, and then turned to the young probationer, who stood by the bedside.

"Is this a hospital?" "Yes; you were knocked down by a cab, and they brought you here!" "Am I dying?"

A strange question to put to a young girl; but Ivy had had to answer many such of late. "I do not know. Will you tell me your name and your husband's address? The doctor wants to let him know!"

A hard, bitter expression came over the

woman's face. She looked at her wedding-ring and laughed. Ivy thought tears would have been less painful than that merriment.

"My husband wouldn't thank anyone who asked him to come to me," said the woman, mockingly, "unless it was to my funeral; and, as to his address, I don't know it myself!"

Sister Emily came up. "Perhaps you have a mother or a sister?" "My sister is dead, and I've quarrelled with my mother. Do you mean I am in danger?"

"We fear so." The nurse passed on her rounds. Ivy stood there longing to speak some comfort. The woman looked at her intently.

"Listen you are good!" she said, with a stress on the last word. "I'm not! I never was! What will become of me when I die?"

Ivy said something about a clergyman, but was answered by a shake of the head.

"I don't believe I should last till you fetched one! I feel very bad. I am five-and-thirty, and I can't remember one good thing in my life!"

"At least you can do one now," said Ivy, gently. "Send a message of forgiveness to your mother!"

"I can do more than that! Listen. My husband hates me; it's not his fault, for I used him badly enough. He loves someone else. When he thought I was dead he planned to marry her. I parted them, and I gloried in it!"

Ivy had grown white as death. She did not speak a word; she simply could not.

"If I died to-night," went on the woman, "and died without telling you who I am, he would never know his freedom. But you said I could do one good thing, and perhaps, maybe it would count against the bad ones!"

Sister Emily was passing. An imploring glance from her probationer stopped her. She was used to death-beds, and almost unconsciously took out her pencil and pocket book.

"Yes," said the dying woman, slowly. "You had better put it down. My name is Augusta Keith. I am Viscount Keith's wife! My mother, Mrs. Clements, lives at Woodbine Cottage, Coldharbour Lane, Camberwell. She will tell you the same. Give her my love. I should like to have seen her once again. Ask my husband to forgive me. I have spoiled four years of his life, but he is young still. He may be happy yet."

She sank back exhausted. A few minutes, and Sister Emily touched the young probationer gently on the shoulder.

"It is all over now. She died quite peacefully at the last!"

All over! The sin and suffering, the wasted life, and cruel deceit! All over! Had that death-bed repentance availed aught? Had the one good deed "been set (as the poor creature hoped) against the many bad ones?" Ivy always believed so.

Mrs. Clements came the next day, and identified her daughter. A formal letter was sent to Lord Keith at Rossmoor Abbey, but as his whereabouts were most uncertain it might be weeks before it reached him.

The funeral was at Highgate Cemetery, and Mrs. Clements took it as a compliment that one of the nurses from the hospital was present at it. She little guessed the link that had been between Augusta's life and that beautiful young nurse's.

Ivy felt thankful it had been settled she was to leave the hospital for the shock had told on her.

Two days after the funeral she went down to Dalbury (having ascertained first that the Tregarthans were not at Stocks).

Mr. Newton had taken a long lease of the cottage in the happy days when Ivy was Lord Keith's fiancée. The kind old man had thought the young couple would like a little retreat near the spot where they first met. He had furnished it after a very different style to the Miss Martins' taste.

Ivy's brief engagement and its tragic ending



[THE FLOWERS FELL FROM IVY'S HAND AT THE SOUND OF THE DEAR FAMILIAR VOICE.]

had never been discussed at Dalbury. Stocks had been deserted by the family ever since October, so there had been no one in the pretty sleepy village to circulate the wonderful changes in Ivy's chequered life.

Molly Pennington met her friend at Euston, and went with her to the Cottage. She had heard the wonderful news conveyed in Mrs. Clements's letter to the Abbey, and she knew—which the Rossmoors did not—that Ivy's voice had been the one to soothe the last hours of Keith's wife.

"She must not be alone," said Molly, to her father. "I should like to go and take care of her."

"Keith will do that before long," returned the banker. "He can't be expected to mourn such a woman as his wife, but in the meantime, Molly, I will try and spare you to go to Dalbury. I suppose I shall have to spare you altogether soon!"

For there was a new vicar of Westerton, who, it was plain to everybody but herself, had lost his heart to practical, kind-hearted Molly.

Mr. West had scruples about proposing to an heiress, and Molly held the firm belief she was too ugly to have a lover, so the two were a constant source of amusement to their friends, who read the state of affairs the parties most concerned never suspected.

A lovely August day, and a girl stands on a stout wooden chair training up gloire de Dijon roses, which are flowering for the second time that summer on the walls of Stocks' cottage—a little thinner, a little older, than when we saw her first, fourteen months ago, but if anything more beautiful.

Ivy has found out now what love means, and though parted from him she holds dear she knows full well he will return to her when once he knows he is free to do so without sin.

"Ivy!"

She had dismounted from the chair, and was picking a few late roses lingering over the

task, as though she loved it. The flowers fell from her hand at the sound of that dear, familiar voice, and for an answer she spoke his name,—

"Harold!"

"My own at last! Oh! Ivy, how we have suffered!"

"But it has not been for long," said Ivy, from her tears; "and, Keith, you must forgive her, for she gave us to each other at the last. She might have died and carried her secret with her to the grave, and then we should have been parted for ever. Keith, forgive her now, or I shall feel a cloud over our happiness!"

"Sweetheart, it shall be as you wish. Ivy, when will you come to me? My heart hungers for you, dear!"

But Ivy could not bear to fill Augusta's place before the grass was green on her grave.

"We were parted at the end of last year," she whispered. "Let us be married on the last day of this, and begin a bright new year together!"

People of practical opinions like Mrs. Martin deemed Ivy extravagant, because, though the trousseau prepared for her wedding was safely stored in wardrobes and boxes in Mr. Newton's care, she positively refused to use it.

Not so much as a bow of ribbons or a pair of gloves, that had been made ready at the Maisonette, would she suffer to form part of her outfit for the wedding fixed for the last day of eighteen hundred and eighty-eight. Indeed, every detail of the ceremony itself was changed.

She and Harold declared the country was lovely in winter, and they would be married at Dalbury by the old clergyman who had known Ivy from her infancy. Mr. Pennington should give her away, and Molly be her only bridesmaid.

A certain change in Molly's plans led to the Rev. Lewis West being invited to fill the post of best man; and it was confidently asserted at

Westerton that he and Molly would play the chief rôles in a marriage ceremony the next time they attended one instead of only subordinate parts.

Mr. Newton had the gout, and stayed away. The Rossmoors and the Tregarthans understood perfectly why they were not pressed to come, agreeing together that after being so nearly Keith's wife a year ago it would be very painful for Ivy to meet them in any other character.

There was a grand gathering at Rossmoor Abbey in February to welcome home the happy pair—Lady Belle, her son and heir, a large detachment of the Tregarthans, General Plumstead, the Penningtons, and Mr. West.

Abraham Newton had gone to his rest while Ivy was on her honeymoon; and the Martins had returned to Australia. The only two of Lady Keith's relations left in England were her maiden aunts.

It was the Earl himself who handed Ivy from the carriage, and led her up the steps.

"Welcome home, my dear!" he said, earnestly. "May you and Harold have as much happiness as has been granted to his mother and me!"

Kenneth Chetwynd, who died before his innocence was proved, and the young mother who had given her life for Ivy's must surely have rejoiced if they were conscious in the better world of the bright future that had dawned for their only child.

After one-and-twenty years of harshness and neglect, followed by eighteen months of alternate joy and sorrow, the clouds had rolled away from Ivy's path!

Her husband's devoted love, his parents' fond affection, friends and kindred, wealth and honours, all these were hers. And in her present bright career she could well afford to forgive the two stern women who brought her up to think herself a burden, and concealed the history of her parentage in "A CRUEL SILENCE."

[THE END.]



["WHAT SHALL I READ, LADY SYLVIA?" ASKED MAURICE FERRERS, TAKING UP THE BOOK.]

NOVELETTE.]

LADY SYLVIA'S LOVE STORY.

—10—

CHAPTER I.

LOVELY little Lady Sylvia Vanbrugh lay softly swinging herself to and fro in a daintily-fringed and tasselled hammock, slung under the spreading branches of a magnificent beech tree on the lawn in front of Burntwood Towers.

She made an exquisite picture, lying there on a splendid tiger skin thrown over the hammock, a huge Japanese fan in one hand, while the other held the cord which set her swinging so languorously under the deep leafy foliage.

The latest novel from Mudie's lay open within reach, but she evinced no desire for its perusal, being evidently in a thoroughly lazy mood, and every now and then turning her china-blue eyes towards the house, as if looking for the advent of a something or a somebody.

It was a glorious day in perfumed July; the air hot and fragrant with the scent of flowers, the sky blue and cloudless—such a day as makes one love life, and wish it to last thus for ever.

All the great windows of Burntwood Towers were set open to the sweet-scented summer air, and from one of these on the ground-floor a young man stepped out on to the wide terrace, and then sauntered over the lawn towards the beech tree.

The dainty little figure in the hammock saw him coming, but she did not turn her pretty golden head round, or welcome him with any effusion of voice or manner.

If this individual was the something or somebody expected, she concealed her feelings under the garb of a complete and sweet indifference; but the new-comer, Sir Ronald

Blair, knew her too well to expect anything else.

Little Lady Sylvia was never effusive, never gushed.

"Well, Sylvia, how goes the world with your ladyship this melting afternoon?" he began, as he reached her side. "Ah! doing nothing with your usual charming grace, I see!"

"What would you have one do on such a glorious summer day as this but enjoy it in a calm, rational manner. One cannot be lazy enough in weather like this!" she returned, quietly, waving her great fan gently to and fro.

"No doubt you are right, and have discovered the true method of enjoyment!" he went on, in a tone of pleasant banter; "certainly during the hottest part of the day. But I hope you will try and indulge in a piece of energy this evening, when it gets cooler, if only to please me!" he ended, sentimentally, gazing at the pretty figure on the tiger-skin.

"I don't especially care about being energetic at any time or season, as you know," she answered, rather languidly, without returning his sentimental gaze. "What is it you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to try a new chestnut mare I've had down from Tattersall's on purpose for you to look at and see if you like. You remember you said you would prefer a chestnut to a bay. I thought, perhaps, you'd come out for a ride this evening, before dinner, and see how she carries you. I've had a capital character with her for good temper, and she's very handsome. I feel sure you will be pleased!"

"I am very much obliged to you, Ronald," Lady Sylvia returned, still a little languidly, and without any extra effusion of voice or manner. "It is very good of you to try and gratify all my small caprices as you do. I will try the chestnut with pleasure, but I

think father has already done something about getting me one; indeed, I believe he has commissioned Mr. Ferrers to go up to Tattersall's one day this week about it, so that I shall hardly need yours, though I thank you immensely for your very kind thoughts and wish to please me, and I appreciate it just the same."

A tiny frown gathers on Sir Ronald's forehead.

"Ferrers!" he says, shortly, repeating the name. "Maurice Ferrers, your father's secretary! What possible judge can he be of horses and how to choose them?"

"He seems to know a great deal about them, nevertheless," Lady Sylvia averred, quietly; "and he is certainly a splendid horseman. He rides as well as you do, Ronald, and that is saying a great deal for him, is it not?"

But her small flattery does not chase away the frown on the young fellow's forehead.

"I wonder the Earl did not ask me to choose a chestnut for you instead of Ferrers," he goes on, in a voice of discontent. "It's much more in my line than his, and I don't think I'm conceited in saying that my judgment must be better than a secretary's. But your father looks upon him as such an admirable Crichton that I suppose he thinks he can do anything and everything that is required of him better than others."

"My father has a very high opinion of Mr. Ferrers," the girl puts in, somewhat coldly. "Indeed, I may say frankly that we all have an extremely high opinion of him," she adds, more firmly.

"All, Sylvia!" echoes Sir Ronald, ironically, with an emphasis on the word all, throwing himself into a cane deck-chair placed invitingly near the hammock ready for occupation. "The 'all' in this case consisting of Lord Vanbrugh and yourself."

"If you like to put it in that way, do," she returns calmly, utterly untroubled by the ear-

caam. "I do not deny that I have a very high opinion of Mr. Ferrers, and so should you if you had sense or discrimination. I cannot imagine why you always seem ready and desirous of disparaging him."

"Oh! Ferrers is well enough in his place," the young fellow answers, half apologetically. "I don't want to pick holes in his coat, if that's what you mean. As I say, he's right enough in his place, and he ought to be kept in it. I don't see why he should be allowed to choose horses for you, or do anything for you, as far as that goes," he ends, impetuously.

"Why, Ronald, you talk just like a great, jealous baby!" says Lady Sylvia, turning her lovely blue eyes reprovingly down on him.

"I am jealous," he returns, quickly. "I'm jealous of everything and everybody that comes near you."

"Yes, unfortunately you are," she says, smiling, and shrugging her pretty shoulders. "I am perfectly aware of that fact, I can assure you, and so must everyone else who knows me. You do not try and conceal it in the smallest degree, and I tell you candidly that it really makes you look ridiculous, Ronald; it does, indeed. Forgive my saying so."

"I can't help it if it does," he answers, gloomily. "I know it's stupid of me, but I can't help it. When I'm jealous I suppose it will come out."

"It certainly does," she says, still smiling; "and often without any foundation."

"Yes, that's where I'm such a fool, I know. Of course it's utterly absurd my being the smallest atom jealous of Ferrers, for instance. It's out of all reason on my part, considering you are not at all likely to fall in love with your father's secretary," and he laughed, rather forcedly however.

"Why not?" Lady Sylvia asks quietly, after a moment's pause. "Wherein would it be such a very extraordinary thing if I did fall in love with Maurice Ferrers?"

"My dear Sylvia, think for a moment before you ask me such an impossible question. A fellow in that position, a mere secretary. Why, you might as well fall in love with one of the gardeners at once."

"Not at all, Ronald. Mr. Ferrers is a perfect gentleman, and a man of breeding—"

"Without a brass farthing to his name," Sir Ronald interrupts. "You could not marry a pauper, and I'm sure you wouldn't if you could."

"I am not sure!" she puts in, coolly, "not at all sure I would not if the pauper was very nice!"

"No, no, Sylvia, you are much too lovely to do anything so foolish," he says, getting up from the chair; and standing by the hammock, takes hold of the little soft hand lying on the tiger-skin. "Besides, you are going to marry me!" he adds, tenderly.

"Am I?" she says, lifting her brows interrogatively. "Who says so?"

"You do!" stroking the soft hand.

"I cannot call to mind having made any such promise yet," she returns, half jokingly, yet with a serious vein underlying her words.

"No, not yet, I know, though I've asked you several times already. But you are going to promise, are you not? Promise me now, and set my poor heart at rest, then I won't worry you with any more jealousy. Come, say yes, darling!" he ends fervently.

There is silence for a few moments, then Lady Sylvia heaves a little sigh, and says, low-voiced—

"I cannot, Ronald. Do not ask me to say yes, because I cannot!"

"Why can you not?" he exclaims, rapidly, holding the little hand in a tighter clasp. "Why do you want to keep on tormenting me like this? How many more times must I ask you, Sylvia?"

"None; no more times, please, dear Ronald. It is only giving us both pain, you to ask and I to refuse. Take no for an answer once and for always, please, please do!" she ends, imploringly.

"I will not!" he returns, doggedly. "I won't give you up, Sylvia. I can't. It has always been an understood thing since we were boy and girl that we should marry—an understood thing between your father and mine. I can't give you up, darling! I love you far too much! I'll wait as long as you like, but I—I won't give you up, for I know you mean to say yes to me in the end!"

"Listen, Ronald," Lady Sylvia says, quietly, but very firmly, gazing up into his face as she speaks. "I shall never say yes to you, however long you may wait. It is useless for you to think so."

"Why not? Tell me why you will not?" he asks, impatiently.

"Because I do not want to marry you," she answers, slowly.

"But why, Sylvia. What reason have you?" he persists. "I am young, I have plenty of money, I am not bad-looking, there is nothing against me; I've no vices, I don't gamble or drink, or play fast and loose in any way, and I adore you! Why don't you want to marry me? Give me your reason?"

"I do not know that I am bound to give you any more reason than I have done already; but since you ask me for the whole truth, I will give it you. I do not love you sufficiently to marry you, and I will not marry where I do not love!"

"But love will come, Sylvia, darling; I am sure it will," he pleads again. "Don't be hard-hearted, try and love me. It isn't as if you were in love with anyone else."

She winces ever so slightly as he utters his conviction, and a faint pink flush comes into the sweet peach-blossom face, but she says nothing, only waves the huge fan evenly backwards and forwards as before.

"Then I might think I had no chance of winning your love!" he continues, in the same feverish way. "But so long as I know you don't care for anyone else, I won't give you up. And you don't, Sylvia, do you?" anxiously.

"Don't what?" she inquires, the pink flush deepening, though the waving fan is steady enough.

"Don't care for anyone else?" he asks, gazing hard at the lovely face so near him.

"You are not my father confessor, Ronald, and I am not going to confess to you," she answers, with an attempt at a laugh. "Suppose, though, I were to say that I did care for somebody else. Mind, I do not aver it as an absolute fact, only as a supposition. What would you say then?"

"That I did not believe it," he returns quickly, "for I know it would not be true."

"But it might be true for all your disbelief," she says again, and the beautiful blue eyes glance maliciously up at him.

Suddenly Sir Ronald bends his head, and kisses the scarlet lips passionately.

"You darling! you darling!" he murmurs. "You shall not care for anyone else but me, I swear it."

Lady Sylvia starts up from her recumbent attitude, her lovely face aflame with anger, and this time the blue eyes gleam at the offender with keenest wrath.

"How dare you!" she gasps, low-voiced.

"How dare you kiss me like that? You have no right to kiss me at all!"

"Give me the right, then," he exclaims.

"Never. It is shameful of you to kiss me like that, and—and Mr. Ferrers must have seen you do it," she adds, wrathfully.

Then the fringed lashes droop over the angry eyes, and the flame-colour dies out of the soft peach cheeks, leaving them their usual creamy white. Sir Ronald Blair turns as she finishes her little wrathful speech, and sees Maurice Ferrers, Lord Vanbrugh's private secretary, wending his way over the smooth lawn towards the magnificent old beech tree, and he also fully recognises the truth of Lady Sylvia's reproach that his unsought caresses had been witnessed. It was simply impossible that it could have been otherwise. It must have been seen.

"Let him," he answers, rather defiantly. "Why shouldn't he? What great harm is there in it, after all? What can it matter whether he did or not?"

"It matters a great deal," she returns, disgustedly, in a low tone; "and I think I—I defeat you!"

Then she sinks back on the splendid tiger-skin, and begins to wave her huge Japanese fan languidly to and fro once more.

CHAPTER III.

MAURICE FERRERS was a very handsome man, there was no doubt of it. Tall, finely proportioned, with broad, muscular shoulders, he looked every inch of his six-foot two. His dark head was closely cropped in true military fashion, and his mouth was almost hidden by a long silky black moustache. Two deep grey eyes looked out on mankind, collectively and individually, with an inscrutable gaze, sometimes meditatively, sometimes amusedly, and very seldom angrily.

Maurice Ferrers was one of those men whose character and inward thoughts are not easily read by the outside world. Always outwardly calm, quiet, self-possessed and well bred, he commanded an attention whether one would or no, being not only handsome, but exceedingly distinguished in manner and gait. Earl Vanbrugh had engaged him as his private and confidential secretary six months back through the recommendation of an old friend, who said the Earl would find him invaluable, which indeed had been so. He also mentioned that Maurice Ferrers came of a very good old county family, which had been extremely wealthy at one time, but that the property having, through some reason or another, fallen into decay, the young fellow had determined to put his shoulder to the wheel, and earn his own living. In fact, it had become a necessity for him to do so; that, personally, the Earl would find him to be a thorough gentleman and most intelligent companion.

The inscrutable grey eyes had witnessed the little love episode most undoubtedly; and, for one brief second or two, they contracted, but, whether with amusement, annoyance, or disdain, it was impossible to fathom. Anyway, they told no tales as he reached their side, holding a book in one hand.

"I have brought Tennyson, as you wished, Lady Sylvia!" he began, at once addressing the little figure on the tiger-skin.

She was quite calm again now, and the pink flush had died out of her soft cheeks.

No one looking at her could have guessed that a tempest of wrath was still raging in her heart at Sir Ronald's ill-timed and undesired caress. Just at the wrong moment, too. The thought made her inwardly furious, though outwardly all was peace.

The young Baronet had dropped into the deck-chair once more; and, as Maurice Ferrers came forward merely nodded, muttering a not very genial, "Good-afternoon, Ferrers!" which was received with a formal bow! If not actually antagonistic, the two men were clearly not too friendly inclined towards each other. Possibly, Maurice Ferrers may have considered that his position did not warrant an assumption of equality, though he did not intend to allow himself to be patronised as an inferior.

"Is it four o'clock already, Mr. Ferrers?" said Lady Sylvia, with an air of quiet indifference, which might have deceived the keenest observer into imagining that she really had no idea what the time was. Whereas, she knew well enough that four had struck by the tower clock some minutes back, and she had been expecting this advent some time with anything but indifference.

"Yes, it is about ten minutes past four, Lady Sylvia," he answered.

"Really! How the afternoon has gone! I had no idea it could be as late as that. I remember now, I did ask you to bring Tenny-

son out at four to read to me," she went on, as if with an effort of memory.

"Or I should not have intruded upon you," he put in, with a glance at Sir Ronald, who sat glumly in his chair. "Only I thought if I did not come you might consider I was guilty of rudeness in neglecting my promise, or that I had forgotten it, therefore I thought it wiser to come than to remain away. Still, I am quite prepared to be dismissed until later on in the day," he added, pleasantly. "I shall be at your service whenever you may require me," and he made a feint of moving away.

Lady Sylvia ceased waving the fan, and turned her golden head towards him.

"Don't go, Mr. Ferrers!" she said, rather quickly. "I am glad you came, for I am just in the mood for Tennyson, and so I am sure is Sir Ronald Blair. He has never heard you read yet. It is a treat in store for him, and I know he will appreciate it quite as much as I do!"

"You estimate my poor powers far too highly, Lady Sylvia," he returned, with a little smile on his lips. "I fear Sir Ronald will be bitterly disappointed when he hears me."

"Oh, no; he will not. I can vouch for your appreciation beforehand, Ronald, can I not?" she inquired, turning her blue eyes in the young Baronet's direction.

"I suppose so," he answered, carelessly, "but I am afraid I can't stay to hear Mr. Ferrers read to-day. Time is getting on, and I must be back at The Grange by five, sharp. It's nearing that now, so I'll be off before you begin the reading, that I may not interrupt the proceedings by leave-taking presently. It would be a pity to spoil the effect, wouldn't it?" with the faintest trace of a latent sneer in his words.

"If you think you would do that you had certainly better go before Mr. Ferrers begins," Lady Sylvia said, coldly, shutting up the fan with a sharp click.

Sir Ronald rose, shook off a bit of moss from his sleeve, and picked up his straw hat from the grass.

"After that pretty speech the sooner I depart the better, I think," he replied, with a touch of temper. "Well, Sylvia, what about the chestnut mare? Will you try her this evening or not? Because, if you won't, I'd better send her back to Tattersall's at once. I'm sorry I had her down now, only I thought you'd be sure to be pleased!" he ended, with some reproach in his voice.

"So I am," she returned, promptly. "It is quite a mistake on your part to imagine I am not pleased. I think it was very kind of you, and if you care to bring the mare round here at seven o'clock I will certainly try her with pleasure!"

"All right, Sylvia!" exclaimed Sir Ronald, mollified by this concession, his sulky frown relaxing into a more genial expression, though he did not know that the girl had not forgiven him, only conceded to suit her own purpose; but that, of course, never entered his mind at this moment.

"I know she'll suit you down to the ground!" he went on.

"Where I sincerely trust she may not throw me," interrupted Lady Sylvia, jokingly. "That vagary on her part would not suit me at all, Ronald, I can assure you. Would it, Mr. Ferrers?" turning to the other listening to the conversation.

"It would not suit any of us to have such a calamity happen to you, Lady Sylvia," he answered, gravely. "I suppose Sir Ronald is sure of the animal's good temper!"

"She's right enough. You're too good a horsewoman for that sort of thing," said Sir Ronald, beamingly.

"I don't know about that," she answered, with an air of small doubt. "Remember, I don't know her, and she doesn't know me. I think I should feel safer if I had two cavaliers to attend me on my trial trip instead of only one," thoughtfully.

Sir Ronald's face falls again perceptibly.

"I think I'm quite capable of taking care of

you, Sylvia!" he said, the little frown coming back on his forehead.

"Of course you are, Ronald!" she assented. "I do not doubt it for a moment; but I'm a tiny bit nervous always on a fresh horse, and I should feel safer, as I say, with two cavaliers instead of one. Perhaps Mr. Ferrers will come too, and help to take care of me. Will you?" she added, turning her sweet face towards him.

"With the greatest possible pleasure!" he answered, low voiced, with a bow; and the deep, grey eyes looked for an instant straight back into those upturned china-blue orbs.

"Thanks, very much. You can ride my bay if you don't mind! Seven o'clock then, Ronald!" turning again to the Baronet; "punctually, mind, and we can have an hour before dinner. *Au revoir!*" with a little nod of dismissal, as the young fellow turned to leave them.

"Very well. Seven sharp!" he repeated, not over amiably though; for the idea of Maurice Ferrers, "that secretary fellow," as he inwardly dubbed him, accompanying as a third, was simply gall and wormwood to him.

"Confound his handsome face!" he mentally ejaculated, as he wended his way back to The Grange, leaving the two under the great branching beech tree.

"I am afraid the idea of Tennyson has driven Sir Ronald Blair away before he intended," said Maurice Ferrers, watching the figure of the Baronet strolling away across the lawn. "I really don't believe I ought to have come after all"—half apologetically—"only you had commanded, and I—wished to obey," hesitating over the final three words as if not sure whether they ought to be uttered.

"Don't put it so autocritically, Mr. Ferrers, please!" Lady Sylvia answered, with a little soft laugh. "I did not command, I only asked as a favour."

"It is exceedingly kind of you to put it in that way! I am, however, only too delighted to obey either command or request at any time when you are pleased to honour me with either!" he returned, with quiet earnestness.

"Well, obey my request now, Mr. Ferrers, and begin to read to me," said her small ladyship, half imperiously, half coaxingly.

Maurice Ferrers sat down on the chair vacated by Sir Ronald, and opened the calf-bound volume of Tennyson which he had brought out with him.

"What shall I read, Lady Sylvia?" he asked, turning over a few of the leaves undecidedly.

"Maud," she replied, after a moment's pause. "Read me 'Maud,' please. I think it is one of Tennyson's best poems!"

"Yes, it is a fine piece of writing, but rather sad," he said in return, while finding the place in the book; and then he leaned back, and commenced the opening lines with fine delivery.

Lady Sylvia was quite right in saying it was a treat to hear him read, for he showed himself a master of the art, and the girl listened with keenest pleasure as he went through the poem finely and dramatically until he came to the close.

Then, as he finished, she said, simply and quietly,—

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ferrers!" and she thoroughly meant what she uttered.

"Would you like anything more?" he inquired, the book still open across his knees.

"As far as my inclination goes I should like a great deal more," she answered, with a little frank smile, "only I am afraid there is not time now. It must be getting late, and I have to gird myself in my habit for this contemplated trial trip at seven. Punctuality is the soul of business, and I always dislike keeping anyone waiting. But even if there was plenty of time, it would be too bad of me to ask more from you. I ought not to usurp all your leisure in that fashion!"

"Indeed, Lady Sylvia, you honour me very highly by desiring anything of me, and it would be impossible for you to ask too much!"

I am only too delighted that you consider my poor accomplishment in the matter of reading aloud pleasurable in even the smallest degree!" he said, with quiet earnestness, but he did not look at her as he spoke.

He was wondering if this dainty, proud little patrician beauty wanted to make a slave of him out of mere feminine caprice, to add one more heart to the many which already must be hers by right of her beauty and position.

If it was indeed so, the caprice was a cruel one, for his love could only be as the love of the moth for the star, set far above him, and out of reach, he thought, regretfully.

And yet sometimes he fancied the blue eyes glanced almost tenderly in his, and those scarlet lips uttered pleasant little kindly speeches which set his heart beating with a sense of an utterly futile love.

And then he would say to himself with stern self-reproach,—

"Maurice Ferrers, you are a fool to fancy these things! It is only her sweet nature, which makes her sweet alike to everyone, even to an inferior such as you must seem to her! Yes, I am a fool, indeed!" he would add, sorrowfully; "but I love her! I am her slave already, whether she would make me so or not! but she shall not guess the truth if I can possibly help it! Ah! if I had been rich and prosperous, as I ought by right to be, how different things might turn out! Then I could openly take my chance with the rest. As it now is, I am nothing but a mere hireling, a servant of a higher grade, truly, but a servant for all that! though neither Lord Vanbrugh or his daughter treat me as anything but an equal. In their case truly *noblesse oblige!*"

A little silence had fallen on the two after Maurice Ferrers' last speech, which neither seemed inclined to break.

Then the secretary rose to his feet, closing the calf-bound volume as he did so.

"Well, if I cannot make myself of any further use just now I will ask you to excuse me, Lady Sylvia. I have some few letters to write before the post-bag goes out," he said, waiting for his dismissal.

"Certainly. But you will not have much time to devote to your letters, because you have to be ready by seven for the trial trip as well as myself, remember," smiling up at him.

"You really wish me to go this evening, then?" he asked, to make sure, doubly sure, that her small ladyship meant what she had said before Sir Ronald Blair left.

He had felt at the time the proposition was dismissed that it was distinctly disagreeable to the young Baronet, who regarded him as an unwelcome intruder.

Indeed, he should have felt precisely the same had he been in Sir Ronald's place. A third is indubitably one too many in any wooing, and that Sir Ronald was an ardent lover was extremely apparent.

"Of course I do," returned Lady Sylvia, very promptly. "Supposing anything were to happen to me?"

"We will not suppose anything so unhappy," he put in, quickly.

"But if anything did I should like to feel I had one reliable cavalier to depend on in case of urgent need. For do you know, Mr. Ferrers, I feel morally certain that Sir Ronald would lose his head at once."

"You must remember that Sir Ronald Blair is very much—attached to you, which might cause the loss of his nerve," he remarked, quietly.

"I suppose he is," she assented, carelessly. "As you say, that might make a difference, in which case it is better to have somebody near one in emergencies that is perfectly heartwhole, is it not?" and she laughed lightly as she said it.

"Yes! much better," he responded, slowly; but the grey eyes did not turn towards her, and so they missed the little faint flush which had come upon her cheeks.

"Well, I expect it is quite time for me to

be thinking of getting ready for my ride," she went on presently, in a lighter tone. "Hold the hammock cord while I get out, Mr. Ferrers, will you, please? I always find it much easier to get into a hammock than out of one. They have a happy knack of slipping away and landing one promiscuously on the grass," and she held the cord out for him to take.

He took it from the little fingers lingeringly, and then awaited her ladyship's commands. He would have liked to lift the dainty little figure bodily out of the hammock in his strong arms, but that he knew was a thing forbidden, still it was an awful temptation at that moment.

"Give me your hand," she said again, in her pretty, imperious way. "I am very lazy to-day, and I require a great deal of help. One cannot be energetic in the summer—at least, I cannot."

Maurice Ferrers took the soft, dimpled hand held out to him without a word, and held it firmly while the girl gently swung herself out of the hammock and planted her little high-heeled shoes on the grass beside him.

"Thanks, very much!" she said, as he regretfully released the hand he had held so firmly. "I should have struggled with that hammock some minutes without your help, I am sure. What a good thing it is to be a man and strong!" she ended, with an air of small gaiety, while opening a big Japanese umbrella to shield her pretty golden head from the sun.

"It is better to be a woman and—lovely!" he returned, quietly, as the two slowly sauntered over the lawn towards the house.

CHAPTER III.

As seven o'clock struck from the great hall clock, the three horses were to be seen being led round the broad gravel sweep in front of the mansion, each by its own groom, ready and waiting for their riders.

The two cavaliers stood at the top of the flight of steps, also garbed ready and waiting for Lady Sylvia, who presently appeared in her habit, looking the most dainty and bewitching piece of feminine loveliness it was possible to describe.

So Sir Ronald and Maurice Ferrers both thought as the little figure came out on to the steps.

She wore a dark green Melton habit, exquisitely made, and fitting to perfection, a plain low riding hat of the same colour, and she carried a little gold-mounted, jewelled-handle whip, which Sir Ronald had presented to her some time back.

At sight of her the grooms touched their hats, and quickly brought the horses to a standstill at the bottom of the steps.

"There, Sylvia, there's the mare! What do you think of her?" began Sir Ronald, pointing to the showy chestnut animal under discussion.

"She looks very handsome, at any rate!" returned the girl, admiringly. "If she is as good-tempered as she is beautiful I am sure I shall appreciate her. What is your opinion of her, Mr. Ferrers?" turning towards him, as he stood on one side a little behind the other two.

"The mare is certainly very handsome, Lady Sylvia, but if you want my candid opinion I should myself say that she was probably faulty as to temper. But of course I may be completely wrong in my estimate of her!" he ended, as if half apologising for this judgment.

"And you are wrong!" broke in Sir Ronald abruptly and rather rudely. "I had a good character with her for temper, because I specially inquired about that. I really don't think you know anything about it, Ferrers. Excuse me."

"Possibly not, Sir Ronald," he returned, quietly. "If you remember, I said I might be wrong; still it is my opinion."

"You mean that you think the mare is vicious?" put in Lady Sylvia, inquiringly of him again.

"Yes, Lady Sylvia. I think she might be if frightened in any way."

"Well, I must be more careful in riding her, and you two men must look more carefully after me," said the girl, lightly, descending the steps to mount.

Sir Ronald ran down in front of her and stood ready by the animal, for to him fell the honour of escorting her lovely little ladyship.

The girl placed her foot on his hand and was in the saddle in a second, easily, gracefully, for she was a most accomplished horsewoman.

Then the other two mounted their horses, and the three rode away.

"The secretary was right about that mare, Jim," said one of the grooms to the other, watching the handsome trio down the avenue. "She's got a vicious eye, but Sir Ronald he wouldn't hear of it."

"Well, her ladyship knows how to handle an animal as good as anyone I know. The mare 'll be well managed, never fear."

And then they went off to the stables to await the return of the riders later on.

Once clear of the lodge-gates, the three cantered along the shady high road leading to more open country, with the intention of getting a good gallop across a heath and trying the mare at some ditches, to see if she could jump well.

Every now and then Sir Ronald cast a baleful glance at the obnoxious third who accompanied them. It quite precluded any attempt at love-making or wooing, and this may have been in some measure Lady Sylvia's intention, beside the feeling, which she would, however, hardly confess to her innermost self, that she liked to have this big, strong, handsome man riding by her side.

He looked every bit as well as Sir Ronald in the saddle, she thought.

When they came to the heath, the horses as well as their riders seemed to feel and enjoy the freshened air.

They tossed their heads and braced themselves together for the gallop over the open ground.

Truth to tell, the chestnut was behaving admirably, and Maurice Ferrers' estimate was undeserved, so it appeared. But just on the height of the heath, where it sloped off on one side towards a big fir spinney, a little piece of white paper, left probably by some pic-nickers on the common, caught by the summer breeze, which had considerably freshened, fluttered gently across their path.

The mare saw it, reared, plunged, swerved, and then flew off like lightning straight in the direction of the fir spinney, evidently mad with terror, and completely beyond the management of its rider.

"Good heavens, Ferrers! what's up with the mare?" cried Sir Ronald in keenest alarm, as he saw this sudden mad rush. "I believe she's bolted. Look at her! Where's she going? Why, she's making for the spinney! Heaven above, Sylvia will be smashed against those trees!"

But Maurice Ferrers never waited to answer, only dug his spurs into his horse's side, and tore wildly after that flying figure rushing towards destruction. For the animal, maddened by fright, seemed to take no heed where it was going.

Lady Sylvia had evidently lost all control over the animal, which had very likely got the bit between its teeth.

The girl never uttered one cry, only grasped the reins tightly in her thin, small hands, and sat upright in the saddle like a rock, staring with wide, frightened blue eyes at the wall of great black firs in front.

She saw her danger plainly enough, though unable to do anything to avert it, and she grew faint at the knowledge of her extreme peril, for it looked as if death stared her in the face.

The next minute there came a thud, a blinding crash in her ears then, utter, unconsciousness of everything. The mare's mad flight was over.

Maurice Ferrers was the first to reach that awful heap by the firs. Both men had ridden their hardest after the runaway animal with the vain thought of trying to avert the catastrophe. But of the two Maurice Ferrers came up first.

He leapt down from his horse, and bent over the little senseless figure lying on the ground, with a horrible fear at his heart that she might be dead.

Ah! how he loved her then! Until this moment he had never known how fiercely love burnt in his heart, or if he did know, had never confessed it to himself. He had often tried to blind himself to the truth, knowing its folly. He had reproached himself, called himself hard names, and tried to steal his heart, all in vain. He knew now that he loved Lady Sylvia Vanbrugh beyond words, beyond expression, and with all his whole soul.

Gently, with inexpressible tenderness, he lifted the still, silent form away from the fallen animal, its mad terror all spent now, and gazed down into the deathly pale face with its closed eyes in an agony of dread, lest it was death that he held.

Then he raised his eyes to Sir Ronald, who had also dismounted, and was standing gazing at Lady Sylvia with a white set face and nervous tremor.

"Is she dead?" he asked, hoarsely. "She looks awful. Curse that vicious brute! Oh! Sylvia, Sylvia! my darling! open your eyes and look at me!" he cried, kneeling down and trying to raise her hand.

"Listen, Sir Ronald," began Maurice, quietly and firmly. "I do not think Lady Sylvia is dead. She may be dreadfully injured, that I cannot say yet, but I think I can feel her heart beating. It is probably a faint that she is now in, and not death. We must hope for the best. But, in any case, she must be got home at once, as soon as it is possible, and a doctor sent for."

"Yes, yes, you are right; I'll ride off for Dr. Barrill, and bring him back with me," said Sir Ronald, hurriedly, rising from his kneeling position by the senseless figure, and leaping quickly into his saddle.

"You had better go to Dr. Barrill's first, and send him on here immediately, then ride on to The Grange, as it is a little nearer than Burnwood Towers, and bring a carriage and wraps back with you. I happen to have a little brandy in a flask with me fortunately, and I will endeavour to revive her in the meantime."

"Yes; that'll be best," answered the young Baronet, his jealousy for once all merged in nervous fear lest, indeed, it was death he looked upon, and that those lovely blue eyes might never open upon him or the world again.

He rode off quickly, spurring his horse to its fastest pace, and was soon lost to view.

Maurice Ferrers proceeded to take a small flask out of the inner pocket of his riding-coat. Then he knelt down, gently raised the golden head on his arm, pillowed it against his breast and moistened the white lips with the brandy, trying to pour a little between the closed teeth.

"My love, my beautiful one! do not die and leave me desolate!" he murmured, caressingly, under his breath, gazing with passionate intensity into the pale, sweet face so near his own.

Though he longed to kiss the colour back into those cheeks and lips, and opportunity now was all his own, honour forbade him to touch them.

"I can call you what I will now, for you cannot hear me," he went on, in the same tone. "You are my love, my life, my very soul. I adore you, I worship you. Oh! you cannot be dead. Heaven could not be so cruel as to take you from all who love you."

Then he moistened her mouth again with the brandy, and managed to get a little between the pearly, clenched teeth and down the throat.

"Wake, my sweet, my dearest! Open those glorious eyes and let me see that life is still there," and again he looked anxiously, almost hungrily, for some small sign of returning animation.

Suddenly, while he was looking, a quiver came on the mouth, the fringed lids fluttered, slowly raised themselves, and two starry blue eyes gazed upward into the grey ones just above them with a look of startled wonder and inquiry in their liquid depths.

For a moment she gazed thus, as if trying to collect her scattered senses, then she heaved a little sigh, and said, slowly and rather painfully,—

"What is the matter, Mr. Ferrers? Where am I? What has happened to me?"

Thank Heaven, she is not dead, at any rate, was his first glad thought as he heard her voice. Then aloud he answered,—

"You have had an accident, and been thrown. The mare ran away with you."

"Ah! yes, I remember now," with a little shudder at the recollection of that wild mad rush against the trees, and the awful thud and crash before she lost all consciousness, "I suppose I fainted?"

"Yes, Lady Sylvia," he returned quietly, trying to banish all passion from his voice, and love from his eyes. "You fainted after the mare collided against the fir. I have been trying to revive you with a little brandy. I most fortunately happened to be carrying with me. Luckily it had been left in my coat after that fishing excursion with Lord Vanbrugh the other day, and I am very glad now that I forgot to take it out. You had better drink a little more if you can. Try and sip a little; it will do you good!" and he held the flask to her lips again.

"No, not any more, Mr. Ferrers, thanks. I feel better now," she responded, pushing away the flask, and raising her golden head from its pillow.

"How dreadfully weak and giddy I do feel," she remarked languidly as she did so, putting her hand up to her head. "I sincerely hope I am not going to faint again. I wish I did not feel so weak."

"You had much better lean on me," he said, putting his arm up for her to rest against if she chose. "I am sure you must feel weak and ill. It has been a terrible shock to you, very terrible. The marvel to me is that you have escaped death, or at least fearful injury. At first I really thought you were—dead," he added in a low tone, trying to steady his voice.

"Did you?" she returned feebly, closing her eyes, and leaning back against the strong arm placed to support her, with a sense of gladness that it was there. "Well you see it was not quite so bad as that!"

"No, thank Heaven, it was not," he put in rapidly.

Truth to tell, the girl was still half stunned with the force of the collision, the brunt of which had, of course, fallen upon the mare, and happily so, otherwise Lady Sylvia must inevitably have been dashed to pieces. As it was, the poor animal would never carry another rider, but lay a bruised and bleeding mass under the fir, her career over for ever.

"But I do feel ill, I confess," she went on slowly. "I must get home as soon as I can. Where's Ronald?" she added suddenly, remembering the existence of her other cavalier and looking round to see if he was anywhere near. "What has become of him? Has he been run away with too, or was he too frightened to stay and see me in a faint, and ran away himself?" with an attempt at a faint smile.

"Sir Ronald has ridden off to bring a carriage back for you," answered Maurice; adding, with true magnanimity, "he was naturally very much concerned at your accident, and very anxious to do something for you, so he went off at once to fetch a carriage. It will not be long now, I am sure,"

"I am glad. I want to get home, for I feel terribly shaken. I think I'll try and walk to meet it. The sight of that poor mare makes me feel quite faint. I can't bear it," and she made an effort to rise to her feet, but sank back with a little groan, the white face turning a shade paler.

"Oh! I can't!" she said plaintively, looking up at Maurice. "I don't seem able to move, and my foot hurts me dreadfully."

"Don't try and move, Lady Sylvia," he answered. "Wait until the carriage comes. If your foot is injured it had better not be moved or touched until the doctor sees it. He will know what to do with it at once. Does it hurt you very much, even when you keep it quite still and quiet?" he added the next moment, as he saw her give a little wince, as if of great pain.

"Yes!" she answered, lifting a pair of pathetic blue stars to his, and then she rested once more against that strong arm, as if unable to keep up without it.

"Poor little Lady Sylvia! I am so very sorry!" he said softly, in a voice full of sympathy, and involuntarily the arm closed more firmly round the little figure with as much mute caress as it dared show.

After this there was silence between them, for the girl had closed her eyes again, and seemed disinclined and, probably, too ill to talk.

But it was not irksome to Maurice Ferrers. To him it was a space of utter sweetness until the carriage drove rapidly up, and Sir Ronald sprang out.

"You're better, I see!" he began addressing Lady Sylvia eagerly. "By Heaven, when I saw you just now I thought you were completely done for, Sylvia; I did, indeed. Curse that brute! If she isn't dead I'll shoot her myself with pleasure."

"Never mind about the mare now, Sir Ronald," Maurice interrupted quietly. "Let us get Lady Sylvia into a carriage and home as quickly as possible. You did not bring Dr. Barrill with you, after all?"

"No, he was out, so I sent a man after him, and he'll be at Burntwood Towers as soon as we are," he answered.

Then they gently lifted the girl between them into the carriage, and drove off.

When they reached home the doctor was already on the steps waiting for them.

"Carry her straight upstairs to her room," he said, as Sir Ronald and Maurice lifted her out. So they took her up to her boudoir, and laid her down on a soft couch, the doctor following behind.

"It is very good of you both," she said, with a faint, grateful little smile. "Thank you both very much for your care of me. You see I could not have done without my two cavaliers after all, could I? Good-bye now," and she put out a little soft white-dimpled hand to each. But to Maurice Ferrers she gave a look from the starry blue eyes.

Then they left her.

CHAPTER IV.

DINNER and dessert was over at Burntwood Towers, and little Lady Sylvia was resting on a low plush-covered lounge on the broad terrace outside the drawing-rooms in the cool of the summer evening.

She was alone for the present, having left her father talking with his secretary over their wine and cigars in the dining-room, Lord Vanbrugh always treating Maurice Ferrers quite as an equal and one of the family, and, in fact, making much of him.

A week had gone by since the accident, from which Lady Sylvia had almost recovered. Her foot had been badly twisted, and she had experienced a great shock to the nervous system, as may be imagined, but no greater injury happily, to everyone's great delight and satisfaction.

She had seen very little of Maurice Ferrers during this week, less than usual she fancied,

though why or wherefore she could not tell. And, somehow, a small thought had crept into her mind that he purposely kept out of her way, and avoided a meeting. That he loved her she felt morally certain. Then why keep away? When she liked anyone she wanted to be with them, the girl said to herself; and because she did like him so much it made her the smallest bit vexed and unhappy, this fancy of hers.

"Why can't he tell me straight out that he loves me?" she argued, while she sat on the terrace in the summer night. "I suppose it is because I am so rich, and Lady Sylvia Vanbrugh. He thinks I should be amazed and very angry at his daring to think of me like that, instead of which I should be glad, quite glad, because, well, because—I love him, she ended, confessing the truth to herself.

Just as she finished her small confession, privately and confidentially, Lord Vanbrugh came out of the dining-room on to the terrace a little further down from where she was sitting, and walked towards her, smoking his cigar.

"Don't sit out here too late, my pet!" he said, as he reached her, sitting down on another chair near. "You must be careful not to take cold, though it's hot enough to-night, and there's no dew."

"Yes, papa, dear! It's too hot to be indoors. It's lovely here on the terrace! Where's Mr. Ferrers? Why doesn't he come out and smoke his cigar here with you, and enjoy the lovely night too?"

"Ferrers has just astonished me very much indeed!" answered Lord Vanbrugh, taking the cigar out of his mouth and holding it down, so that the smoke might not drift in his daughter's direction.

"Astonished you? How, dear?" asked the girl, wondering what he meant.

"By formally resigning his appointment at Burntwood Towers as my secretary," said Lord Vanbrugh in return.

"Resigning his appointment as your secretary, papa!" queried the girl, faintly, in greatest surprise, for it came upon her quite as a shock. "Do you mean that he—he wishes to leave us?"

"So he made me understand!"

"But why? What reason has he? Did he give you no reason for resigning?" she asked, again.

"No definite one that I could make out!" returned Lord Vanbrugh. "He commenced by simply informing me that he must resign his appointment; and, when I pressed him to give me a reason he said that, with infinite regret, he found himself compelled to resign. More than this I could not get out of him!"

"It is very strange!" murmured the girl, doubtfully. "Very strange, and very sudden!"

"Yes. It took me completely by surprise, and not a pleasant surprise either. I like Maurice Ferrers very much indeed. He has been, and is, most useful and invaluable to me. I really don't know what I shall do without him. I don't, indeed, Sylvia!" he added, very regretfully.

"I don't understand it at all!" she said, presently. "There must be some great reason for his wishing to leave Burntwood Towers and throw up his appointment of which we know nothing about; and, which, perhaps, he thinks would not interest us, or does not like to tell us of."

"He certainly showed no inclination to enlighten me on the subject just now," responded her father. "Is rather vexed me to tell you the truth, because I have always treated Ferrers as a friend, and I would do anything for him I could if he wanted help or advice. Perhaps you could get his reason out of him! Women have more tact in these matters than men. Anyway, I don't want to lose him?"

"Nor I either?" thought the girl, but she judiciously kept her thought unuttered.

"I'll send him out here to you with a shawl, and then you'll see if you can get him to tell you his reason," said Lord Vanbrugh, rising

from his chair. "If it's a question of money I'll double his salary. I don't see what else it can be, though, of course, there may be private grounds for his wishing to leave. A family affair perhaps. At any rate, we will try and get to the bottom of his resignation if we can, and do our best to keep him if possible. The idea of his going quite upsets me!"

Somewhat, Lord Vanbrugh walked from the terrace back into the house, and left Lady Sylvia once more alone.

She felt it was too premature to say to her father,—

"How would you like him to remain altogether for good as a son-in-law, since you are sorry to part with him?" for as yet there had been no single word of love between her and Maurice.

Truly, her father's secretary was not a good match as far as worldly judgment went—not like Sir Ronald, for instance.

Well, time would show how things were to turn out; and, so thinking, she heard a step on the gravel, and, looking up, saw Maurice Ferrers standing in front of her with a light silk shawl in his hands.

"Lord Vanbrugh asked me to bring this shawl out to you, Lady Sylvia," he began. "He was afraid you might feel chilly sitting on the terrace. Is it quite wise, do you think?" he added, looking down at her.

"Quite wise, I think; and, certainly, quite delightful this very lovely summer night! Thanks very much for bringing me a shawl, though I do not really think I need it," she responded, prettily; but she made no attempt to take the shawl from him.

"I think I would put the shawl on if I were you!" he said, again. "Remember, you are still something of an invalid."

"But you are not me, Mr. Ferrers!" said the girl, comically regarding him, and mentally determined to break down that wall of formality and reserve which he had somehow within this past week wrapped round him; "There is no reason, however," she went on, gaily, "that because I do not put on the shawl that you should not make yourself useful and put it on for me!"

"Certainly, if you wish," he responded, quickly; and as she leaned a little forward he drew the silk wrap round her shoulders. "Can I get you anything else?" he asked, when he had finished, evidently intending to move away when she had answered the question.

The girl's heart fell a little. The action showed so plainly a desire to avoid staying with her. It was no fancy on her part, it was the truth. He did wish to avoid her presence. What could it mean? It did not look like love!

"No," she answered more gravely. "I do not want anything else, Mr. Ferrers, thank you. But sit down, I wish to talk to you a little."

Maurice sat down as he was bidden, without a word, and she began at once.

"Papa has just been telling me a piece of news which vexes both of us," she said, earnestly. "He says that you have resigned your appointment at Burntwood Towers. Is that really true?"

"Yes, Lady Sylvia, it is quite true," he answered, after an instant's pause.

"Why do you wish to leave us?" she asked again, gently, with ever so little reproach in her voice.

"It is less my wish, Lady Sylvia, than my misfortune to find it a necessity to do so," he returned, hesitatingly, with an emphasis on the word wish!

"But why. Tell me why?" the girl persisted. "Give me the reason? What necessity can there be now more than before? Are you no longer here? Is there anything you would like different? Tell me? I am sure papa will be too glad to have anything remedied at once that you find disagreeable or would like altered. Is there, only tell me?"

"You are very good and kind, but—" and he waited.

"But you are too proud to give us your

reason?" she put in quickly, finishing his sentence her own way.

"No, Lady Sylvia, not too proud. It is not that!" he said again.

"Well, what is it, then, Mr. Ferrers?" and she looked straight at him.

"I cannot give you my reason. It is impossible. You would not like to hear it."

"How can you possibly know beforehand? On the contrary, I am sure that I should like to hear your reason very much. I ask you for it now, at once. Come, tell me. I am waiting to hear," she ended, with pretty imperiousness, rising from the lounge, and standing against the marble balustrade of the terrace in the moonlight.

He, too, rose from his chair, and stood upright beside her. It might have been Romeo and Juliet in the moonbeams just then.

"I cannot—I dare not give you my reason," he answered low-voiced, not trusting himself even to glance at her.

"Dare not! Am I such a very terrible individual, then?" with a reproachful look up at him; but he did not meet those lovely blue eyes, or answer her question. "Tell me," she said softly the next minute, in a pretty, coaxing voice, which would have wrenched the sternest resolve from any male breast, "tell me why you are going to leave—us?"

He looked away over the moonlit garden before he answered; then he said slowly, as if wrong from him unwillingly,—

"Because I—I love—you!"

There was perfect silence on the terrace for at least a whole minute after he had spoken.

"Is that all your reason?" she asked softly at last.

"All!" he repeated, in wonderment, for he had expected her to break out in scornful anger over his confession. "Is that not enough reason for my leaving here? You do not understand what I said, surely? You cannot have heard?"

"Oh, yes, I did. I heard quite well—perfectly. Don't you think it is rather a silly reason on the whole?" she added, raising her eyes to his.

"You are laughing at me," he said, quickly.

"No, I am not laughing at you. I am very serious, Mr. Ferrers," returned the girl, still gazing at him.

"It is no laughing matter to me," he went on. "You have wrong the truth from me, Lady Sylvia, or you should never have known it. But, knowing it, you must understand how terribly I feel my position here, and that it is impossible for me to remain at Burntwood Towers under the circumstances."

"Why not?" she queried again, still in that same pretty, soft way.

"Why not?" he echoed. "Have you no heart, no feeling? Can you not see that it would be a purgatory for me if I did? Are you so cruel as to wish that?" he ended, stung into reproach by what he fancied was only cold caprice and mere heartlessness.

"Suppose I say that I do not want you to go? That I wish you to—stay? Is that so very cruel?" she queried again.

He flashed a swift glance at her from his grey eyes.

"Are you playing with me?" he said, eagerly. "Do you mean what you say? Do you know what your words mean to me?"

"They mean stay!" she said, under her breath; and she held out one little dimpled palm.

He caught it in his.

"Is it true?" he said, passionately bending down his head to look in her eyes. "It can't be; it is too great a bliss!"

"Is what true?" she whispered.

"That you care for me a little," he returned, rapturously.

"Not a little; a great deal!" she ended, very softly.

"My love, my sweetest, I adore you!" he murmured, drawing her close to him, forgetful of everything but the bliss of the moment.

And for the time being these two hearts were supremely happy in their love.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Lady Sylvia descended to the dining-room later than was her custom, on the following morning to breakfast, she found her father reading a small pencilled note.

He held it out to her as she came up to him for the usual morning salutation, saying,—

"Barker has just given me this note from Ferrers, telling me that having received an urgent letter on business matters by the early morning post, he found himself obliged to go up at once to London, and excusing his early departure by saying he wanted to catch the morning mail to London, hoping to be back this evening or to-morrow, if possible. But you will see what he says when you read his note!"

The girl read it through, and then returned it to Lord Vanbrugh.

"It is evidently written in a great hurry," she commented.

"Yes; Barker says he scribbled it off in the library before starting, having only just time to catch the mail. I wonder what called him away? Something connected with his last night's resignation, perhaps. By-the-bye, Sylvia, did you manage to get at his reason for wanting to leave me?" he added, taking up the morning paper and glancing over the pages.

The girl flushed a faint, delicate pink, and helped herself to another lump of sugar.

"Well, papa dear, not quite, perhaps. But I have an idea that it is not a very great reason after all, and that in the end you will find he will stay at Burntwood."

"I'm sure I hope so. I can't bear the idea of his quitting me, either as friend or secretary," he returned, and then devoted himself to his Times.

Lady Sylvia had thought it hardly wise to enlighten her father so soon on all points. That must come by degrees a little later on.

Lord Vanbrugh was a very proud man, she knew, and at first might not take kindly to the fact. But as he was also a most indulgent father, and never crossed her wish in anything, she felt pretty secure that by gentle management and tact she would get her own way finally without opposition.

As yet nothing had been discussed between the two lovers but their mutual love.

They had kissed and separated on the terrace in the moonlight with every assurance and vows of love, but nothing more definite of what was to come in the future. The present had been perfectly sufficient for those two beating hearts.

Lady Sylvia finished her breakfast, and then getting a book wended her way in the direction of the terrace, with the intention of sitting and dreaming the last night's sweetness over again.

She had hardly seated herself on the low tapestry covered chair which the man-servant brought but for her especial benefit when, looking up at the sound of horse's feet, she saw Sir Ronald cantering up the avenue.

He had been over every day to inquire how she was, manifesting the keenest anxiety, and blaming himself without stint for having urged her to try the mare. Lady Sylvia could not but be touched by his evident devotion, though it was impossible for her to return his affection.

"Poor fellow! He will be awfully upset when he hears the truth," she thought, as she caught sight of him now.

Sir Ronald presently made his appearance on the terrace, and the servant promptly came behind with the cane deck-chair which was his favourite seat, and, in fact, usually dedicated to his service.

"Going on all right, Sylvie, I see?" he began, seating himself as he spoke. "I believe you look better to-day than you've done since that confounded brute nearly killed you. Is the foot quite well?"

"Only a little stiff now, Ronald, thanks!" she answered.

"That's right. You'll be able to dance at

our wedding yet!" he added, gaily. "You didn't expect me over quite so early as this, I suppose?" he went on the next moment. "It is early, I know; but the fact is, I wanted to tell you something rather particular!" and he paused.

She looked round at him, and noticed for the first time that he seemed eager in manner, and wore a slightly triumphant air, as if the something in particular he was about to impart was not a wholly disagreeable piece of information to him—at any rate.

"Well!" she answered, with but languid interest at present, for her mind was much too occupied with her own thoughts to take much heed of outside news. "What is it?"

"A very curious thing happened to me last evening after I left Burntwood. I'm glad I did not stay to dinner, as your father wanted, or I should have missed it, and I would not have missed it for anything! A very curious thing!" he repeated with emphasis.

"You are very mysterious about your curious adventure, Ronald!" said the girl, still uninterestedly.

"And I heard a very curious fact about someone which I consider both you and your father ought to know!"

"About someone! Who?" she queried, glancing carelessly round at him.

"Ferrers!" he answered, slowly. "About Maurice Ferrers, the secretary!"

"What about him?" she said, very coldly. "I daresay there are plenty of people ready to pick holes in others. I detest all petty scandalising myself. What did you hear so extraordinary about Mr. Ferrers?" and the pretty scarlet lips curled in some small disdain.

"I heard that he was—married! That he had a wife!" came the answer, in a slow and slightly triumphant tone.

"Married!" echoed Lady Sylvia, faintly, after a pause, vainly endeavouring to steady her voice, while the colour ebbed out of her cheeks, leaving it as white as when she lay in that dead faint but a week before. "Mr. Ferrers married! Oh! it can't be true, Ronald, it is impossible! There must be some great mistake in what you heard!" she added more forcibly, unable to believe this sudden announcement.

"There is no mistake, Sylvia," Sir Ronald answered doggedly, for he noticed her pallor and agitation, and the old jealousy surged up in him. "I saw the lady herself, Mrs. Maurice Ferrers!"

"Where?" she asked again, faintly.

"I'll tell you the whole story of what happened, and then you can judge whether there's any mistake about it, though I can't exactly see myself," with a short laugh, "what it can possibly matter to you whether Ferrers is married or not. There is nothing so extraordinary in his having a wife, only in his having kept it so precious close that no one had the slightest suspicion of it. Just as if he was ashamed of the fact, and wanted to keep it a profound secret. You didn't know it, did you? He hasn't confided in you already, has he?" with a suspicious glance in her direction.

"No, Ronald, Mr. Ferrers has not confided, as you express it, in me. I did not know of his—his marriage!" she answered, compelling herself by a supreme effort of will to speak quietly and evenly.

"Well, I didn't really suppose such a thing could be, but I'll get on with my story," settling himself for his recital. "You remember I said I couldn't stay to dinner when your father asked me, because I had an appointment in the village with a man to settle about some carpentering work I want him to do at The Grange next week, and you always dine so late at Burntwood that I knew I could not manage to get away in time. I had finished my business and was going home at a pretty good pace, too, when, in the middle of the lane leading out of the village, I came upon a woman sitting on the trunk of a tree lying on the grass by the roadside. She got

up as I came along, and stepped forward just in front of me."

"What was she like?" Lady Sylvia asked, quietly, as he paused a moment.

"Like!" he repeated. "Well, a handsome person I thought her. Tall, dark-haired, with flashing black eyes that went through one, and a foreign accent it sounded to me. Yes! decidedly a very handsome person," he ended, reflectively.

"She got up to speak to you, I suppose?" the girl questioned again, more for the sake of saying something with a pretence of interest than anything else.

"Yes," she halted in front of me as I say, and began to speak at once. 'Do you know of a place called Burntwood Towers somewhere hereabouts?' she asked, in a hesitating way, looking me through and through with two great burning black eyes. I thought it rather a curious thing to be sitting by the roadside, evidently waiting for some passer-by to ask her question of, when anyone in the village could have told her where Burntwood Towers was. However, perhaps she had her own private reasons for doing so."

"No doubt," commented Lady Sylvia, as he waited for her to speak.

"Of course I answered, 'Yes,' and that it was some little distance away. 'How far?' she asked again. I told her quite three miles off, and a lonely road after nightfall, for I thought she might be contemplating a walk here, not knowing the distance. When I had finished speaking she was silent a moment, as if making up her mind to ask me something further; then she looked hard at me again, and said, abruptly,—

"Do you know Burntwood Towers well? Are you acquainted with all the inmates?"

"Certainly I am!" I responded, immediately, wondering what, on earth she was driving at.

"You can tell me then whether there is someone named Ferrers living at Burntwood Towers? Mr. Maurice Ferrers?" she repeated, slowly.

"Yes, there is," I returned at once, "Mr. Maurice Ferrers is Earl Vanburgh's private secretary."

"Ah! I am right then," she put in, quickly, her black eyes suddenly lighting up with a gleam of intense satisfaction. Then she went on still rapidly, but more as if communing with her own thoughts, than addressing her remarks to me. "So I have found him out at last. My trouble and search has not been all in vain. He cannot hide himself from me any more now!"

"I must say that when I heard her talk like this my curiosity was aroused. I began to smell a rat in the direction of Mr. Maurice Ferrers, and I foresaw a scene in store for that gentleman when this lady presented herself. For the life of me I could not help saying,—

"Are you thinking of going to Burntwood Towers, to-night, because it is a lonely country road, and you will scarcely meet anyone to direct you? It is quite three miles and a-half from here. I should get some one from the village to act as a guide if I were you. There are several cross-roads on the way, and you might take a wrong turning."

"No," she answered, fixing her eyes on me as if trying to read my thoughts, "I shall not go there to-night. It is too late for—for paying visits. I shall wait until to-morrow."

"I am going to Burntwood Towers to-morrow morning," I said, carelessly, as if I was only making a very natural remark, under the circumstances. "Shall I tell Mr. Ferrers that a lady has been inquiring for him, and prepare him for your coming?"

"She laughed—a low, hard laugh, and then she nodded her head in affirmation."

"Yes!" she answered, with emphasis, "you can tell Mr. Ferrers that his wife, you understand, his wife, is coming to see him! Good-evening." And, making me a sweeping bow, she walked off in the direction of the village.

"I turned and looked after her until she was

cut of sight round the corner of the road, then I, too, walked off on my way home. And so ended my little adventure. What do you think of it?" added Sir Ronald, turning his eyes questioningly on Lady Sylvia.

"I don't know what to think of it, Ronald," she returned, constrainedly, after a moment's pause. "What can one think about it? Perhaps—perhaps it may not be true, after all."

"Perhaps not. At present it only rests upon her testimony, and she may be crazy on that point for all we know. However, time will soon show whether it is true or false. She evidently intends coming to see Ferrers, and I think it might be as well to give him a hint on the subject beforehand, or shall I let things shape themselves without any interference? What do you advise?"

"I don't think we have any business to interfere in Mr. Ferrers' private affairs," the girl answered, in a low voice. "He has concealed his marriage, if, indeed, it is a true statement which you heard last evening, for some reasons of his own, rightly or wrongly it is impossible to say. Besides, he is away at present. He went away by the early morning mail before we came down to breakfast, on some urgent business, so he wrote to the Earl."

"More likely to get out of the way of his wife," put in Sir Ronald, not without some satisfaction in his tone, for, truth to tell, he was not at all sorry to find a flaw in this handsome secretary, of whom he had such qualms of jealousy. "Probably he got to know, somehow or other, that she was on his track, and so he fancied the best thing for him to do was to be absent when she called. I think the bare fact of his never mentioning the existence of a wife in the background shows that he was not too fond of her, and from what she said he has been trying to hide himself. For my part, I consider that the immaculate secretary has been behaving in an underhand manner, and if I were the Earl I should pack him off about his business at once."

"My father will act for the best," the girl returned, very coldly. "It can be nothing to us, or alter his position at Burntwood, whether he is—married or not!" and she rose from her chair.

"Are you going in?" he asked; with some disappointment, for he was contemplating the enjoyment of an extended *vis-à-vis* with her this beautiful summer morning.

"Yes, I have some letters to write. The Earl is in the library, I believe, if you like to go in and see him."

"No," he answered, sulkily. "Your father won't want me this hour of the morning, I'm sure. Besides, you know I only came over to see you; but it's evident you don't want my company, so I'll go."

Lady Sylvia made no response to this attack—only tapped her little heel impatiently on the gravel.

She was in no mood for reproach or argument just at present. All she wanted was to get away, to think over what the young Baronet had told her.

"I believe you are vexed with me because I told you that story!" he went on, moodily. "Just as if it was my fault that Ferrers had a wife. I begin to detest the very sound of his name, and I wish he had never come to Burntwood at all. I hate him!" he ended, vindictively.

But the girl was already on her way indoors, so he made his concluding remark alone.

Sir Ronald walked round to the stables, mounted his horse and rode back to The Grange in no happy frame of mind.

Neither was little Lady Sylvia happy in her mind as she ran up to her boudoir and threw herself on a couch.

"Oh, Maurice! Maurice!" she moaned softly, in an abandonment of grief. "How could you have been so cruel as to make me love you! Oh, my love! my love! you have broken my heart!"

CHAPTER VI.

PRESENTLY Lady Sylvia sat up and dried her eyes as a thought suddenly struck her.

"Yes," she exclaimed, vehemently, "I will see this lady myself if she comes here to-day, and make sure of the truth before I grieve like this. Perhaps I am making myself miserable for nothing; but if it is true—if it is true—" and she broke off with a little sob.

Waiting half-an-hour to allow all traces of tears and discomposure to pass away, she then rang the bell for her maid, and gave strict orders that should a strange lady call during the day, and ask for Mr. Ferrers, she was to be shown up straightway into the boudoir.

The morning passed, however, without any sign of the visitor. Twenty times at least did that lovely face gaze out of the window which commanded a view of the avenue and grounds leading to the house, to see if any figure was wending its way under the trees.

Just about four o'clock, however, and when Lady Sylvia had begun to give up any idea of the visitor fulfilling her word, the tall figure of a lady came slowly along the broad avenue under the elms, and up to the mansion.

In another couple of minutes the same lady was quietly ushered into the boudoir by Lady Sylvia's maid, and the door closed behind her.

The girl's heart beat fast as she came forward towards the newcomer, who stared hard at the lovely face in evident surprise, having expected a very different one.

"You wish to see Mr. Ferrers?" Lady Sylvia began in her sweet voice, which trembled a little, in spite of her endeavour to keep it calm.

"Yes. I came to see Mr. Maurice Ferrers. I asked for him," the stranger answered.

"Mr. Ferrers is not here at present. He is away," Lady Sylvia went on, finding the other waited for her to speak.

"Away!" repeated the lady quickly, advancing nearer the girl. "I was told he was here, that he lived here as Earl Vanbrugh's secretary. Is it not true, then?"

"It is quite true. Mr. Ferrers is my father's secretary," returned the girl, quietly.

"You are, then, a daughter of the house?" queried the stranger, abruptly, as if to make certain whom she was addressing before proceeding further.

"Yes; I am Lady Sylvia Vanbrugh," was the quiet response.

"And you say that Mr. Ferrers is absent?" bending a keen glance on the girl's face.

"Why is he absent from his duties here now? You are sure, quite sure, that he is away?" she added, with marked emphasis.

"Perfectly sure. Why should I tell you what is not true?" said Lady Sylvia, haughtily, for the tone and manner was offensive, and implied a doubt of her veracity.

"I beg your pardon!" the lady put in, hastily; "I was wrong to doubt what you told me. You, at least, can have no motive for misleading me; but I have been tricked so often that it makes me suspicious of everything and everybody. When did he go?"

"Mr. Ferrers left Burntwood early this morning. He wrote word that he was called away suddenly on urgent business," said Lady Sylvia in reply.

"Business!" with a scornful laugh. "Bah! he is not to be believed—he never was. I will tell you what was his real reason for being called away suddenly at a moment's notice like that. It is because he has, no doubt, heard, somehow or other, that I had tracked him down at last. So he ran away, coward that he is, because he feared to meet me—feared to meet his wife!"

As the word fell jarringly from her lips Lady Sylvia started and shivered.

It was true then, really true, that Maurice, her treasure as she had thought, was married already. She had wasted her love vainly, hopelessly. Oh, the misery of it!

"His wife; do you hear, Lady Sylvia Van-

brugh? His poor, neglected, deserted wife. He married me abroad, and he deserted me abroad, leaving me ill, alone, penniless; but if he thinks to escape me he is mistaken. I will follow him all over the world to find him at last. He shall acknowledge his wife!" she ended, fiercely, sinking into a chair, as though exhausted by her emotion.

Lady Sylvia glanced pityingly at her. If she spoke truthfully, she had evidently been very badly treated. After all, the love of this man was not a happiness to either of them.

"Does he not wish to do so then?" the girl asked, in a low tone.

"Does it look like it?" responded the other, bitterly. "Oh, he has behaved shamefully, cruelly to me. Why should I not speak of it openly to all? Listen. I was a singer when he married me, one winter season in Algeria. I thought he was rich; he said he was. However, I soon found it was false, and that all we should have to live on was what I earned in my profession. Still I did not reproach him, for I loved him, and worked all the harder."

"But he tired of me after a time, and then I fell ill and could not sing. And so one day he left me ill and penniless, leaving a few lines to say that it was better henceforth we should be strangers. I lost my head then, and had an attack of brain fever. I was taken to the hospital, and in time recovered. Since then I have been seeking him everywhere. Several times I have been on the point of finding him, only to be tricked at the last moment; and now this disappointment is almost more than I can bear. I deserve your pity, indeed I do!" she added, almost imploringly, looking up into the girl's face.

"You have it," answered Lady Sylvia, in a voice full of sympathy, for the recital touched her to both pity and indignation. "I am very sorry for you, and I do pity you very much, indeed. I am glad you have told me your sad story, because unless I had heard it I should have found it hard to believe Mr. Ferrers capable of what you tell me. We have always thought so much of him at Burntwood, but it seems we have been terribly deceived in every way—terribly deceived," she repeated, with a sigh, for her idol had fallen from his high pedestal in her estimation, and was shattered to pieces.

"I, too, thought him honourable when I first married him," said the other, mournfully, "but I soon found out my mistake. He is a bad man, cruel and heartless. He married me because he knew I earned plenty of money with my voice. But when I was ill, and could earn no more for him to spend, he left me to starve or die, he did not care which. Oh! I have a goodly account to settle with him when we meet—a long reckoning. To think he was so near me, and now gone at the last moment. It is maddening!"

"But Mr. Ferrers is coming back to Burntwood. He has not left here permanently as far as we know," Lady Sylvia said, slowly, after a moment's pause.

She considered it her duty to tell the poor neglected wife this fact, as it might help her.

The other shook her handsome head in negation.

"No," she said, forcibly, "he will not come back if he thinks I am hereabouts. He will keep away and send some miserable excuse for his absence. If you only had some clue of where he went; but London is a big place, one can easily be lost there. Still, I shall follow him up. My search will never be ended until I meet him face to face."

"I wish I could help you, but I do not see how I can," Lady Sylvia said again, sorrowfully. "The only thing I could do would be to let you know if your—your husband came back here."

"Yes! you could help me in that," the other answered, eagerly. "I am staying in the village of Morecombe, and will leave you my address so that you might send to me if he did by any chance return to Burntwood. But he will not, I am sure of it. I shall have

to begin my search anew," she ended, wearily. Then she rose to her feet.

"You have been very kind to listen to me, Lady Sylvia Vanbrugh, and I thank you with all my heart for doing so. If you should have any news for me I am staying at the little farm at the end of the village as Mrs. Hill. If I hear nothing in two days I shall go on to London. Again receive the thanks of a very unhappy, miserable woman."

And taking up the girl's hand she put it to her lips with a little foreign gesture. Then Lady Sylvia rang the bell for the maid to show the visitor downstairs, and watched her pass away down the avenue and out of sight.

"I wonder which is the most unhappy, she or I?" thought the girl very sadly, as she looked at the receding figure. "Love seems very cruel sometimes."

CHAPTER VII.

FIVE o'clock in the afternoon of the following day had just rang out from the big chiming clock as Lady Sylvia slowly descended the staircase and walked across the oak-panelled hall to the library door.

She was very pale, and her heart throbbed at the thought of the ordeal which she told herself she was presently to pass through, and for which she was trying to steel her nerves.

Maurice Ferrers had returned to Burntwood Towers. He had telegraphed during the morning to the Earl, announcing his return, and asking to be met at the station by a certain train.

This had been down, and an hour ago Lady Sylvia had from her boudoir-window, where, it must be confessed, she had been watching for his coming, seen him driving up the avenue to the house in the dog-cart.

Since then he had been closeted with the Earl in the great library at Burntwood, and now a summons had come to the girl from her father, asking her to come to him in the library, as he wished to speak to her there.

On what subject she did not at present know, although she guessed it must be in some way connected with what she had heard from that poor, deserted wife on the previous day. She could hazard no other conjecture than that; and she shrank from the ordeal of meeting Maurice Ferrers, and hearing the truth from his lips.

As to her love, it should die and be buried for ever in the past, forgotten as if it had never been. Her own lips should never utter an allusion to it, and he would not dare to revive a memory which was a dishonour to him.

But it was hard, very hard, to have to meet him thus, with the recollection of all his loving words, and his passionate kisses of but two days past. Only two days, yet it seemed a lifetime now.

True to her promise, made on the previous day, she had at once sent a letter to the poor wife by her maid telling her of Maurice Ferrers return. Ah! how false he had been through it all! False to both; and she had thought him so true, so noble!

The girl turned the handle of the library door, and walked into the room, closing the door behind her. There were only two people in the room, the Earl and Maurice Ferrers.

The Earl was standing by the big oak table in the centre, but the secretary stood close to the open window, apparently looking out upon the terrace. He did not turn as Lady Sylvia came in, but remained in the same attitude as before.

"Sylvia, my child," began the Earl, coming towards her from the table. "I have sent for you to hear something which has just been told to me, and which has astonished me very much," and he paused.

"Yes!" said the girl, faintly, looking up in the Earl's face as she spoke. "Yes! papa, dear, what is it?" but in her heart she thought she knew already what that something he had

heard and which so astonished him was. She did not need to be told.

"Maurice has just been making a confession to me, and told me a strange piece of news," he went on. "I confess it has surprised me more than I can say, and, I am sure, when you hear it you will be extremely surprised too. He wishes to tell you himself, so I'll leave it to him to make his own confession," ended the Earl, taking up two bulky documents from the table, and going out of the room, leaving the two alone.

As the library door closed the immovable figure at the open window turned quickly and came close up to the girl, putting his arms round her tenderly, and drawing her to him.

"My darling! my darling!" he said, passionately. "Kiss me first, before I tell you anything. Kiss me a sweet welcome back," and he bent his handsome face to hers.

Lady Sylvia started back as if she had been stung, and pushed those strong encircling arms away. They made her forget duty, everything that she ought to remember.

"How dare you ask me to kiss you a welcome back?" she panted, in a low, painful voice. "A welcome! I have none to give you, none. How dare you call me your darling?"

Maurice Ferrers stared at her in utter bewilderment. To him, her repulse and speech seemed inexplicable.

"I dare because I love you!" he answered, impetuously. "You are my darling—my heart's darling. Don't you believe me?"

Then, as she made no answer, and he saw the lovely white set face, he went on in anxious wonderment.

"What is it, Sylvia, dearest? What makes you speak to me like that? In what have I offended you? Tell me? Are you angry with me?"

"Yes!" she said slowly. "You have offended me deeply, irretrievably. You—you have broken my heart," she ended with a little sob in her throat.

"Broken your heart?" he echoed after her in amazement, whether true or feigned he could not determine. "How? In what way?"

"Ask your own conscience," she returned, bitterly. "It should tell you quite as well as I can."

"You bewilder me," said Maurice Ferrers, rapidly. "I cannot understand your accusation. Two days ago you accepted my love, and returned it, so you said, and so I fondly believed. We plighted our troth on the terrace in the moonlight without a shadow of doubt between us. Now you repulse my caresses, and accuse me of breaking your heart! I swear that I love you no less now than I did then. I swear that I have nothing on my conscience to make your accusation a just one. What fancy have you got into your head about me since I saw you last; for as Heaven is above us, I do not know what you mean!" he ended, with every appearance of truth in voice and gesture.

"Stay, Maurice Ferrers!" put in the girl, coldly, looking up into his face for the first time during the interview. "How about your confession?—the confession my father said you had made to him, and wished to make to me? You forget that, surely, when you say you do not know what I mean?"

The grey eyes stared back at her full of doubt, for her speech implied a knowledge of what he was about to say, which seemed very surprising to him.

"What I have just told the Earl is no guilty secret. You wrong me greatly if you think so," he answered, somewhat proudly. "My confession, as it has been called, is not a terrible one. I wished to tell you myself, because, perhaps foolishly, I wanted to hear you say again that you loved me, as you said two nights ago. I wanted to make sure that you really loved Maurice Ferrers, the poor man, your father's secretary, who had nothing to offer you but his adoring love, which, indeed, was all yours. It was a foolish lover's wish,

perhaps, but excusable, surely! My only desire was to make certain of my bliss before you heard that your lover was no longer poor as you fancied him—that since you parted with him on the terrace in the moonlight he had become wealthy and titled. I am not Maurice Ferrers now—but Lord Combermere of Combermere Abbey!"

His words rang out clearly and distinctly in the silence of the big room, falling on Lady Sylvia's ears with startling force.

"You," she faltered, after a moment's pause. "You Lord Combermere?"

"Yes! by a wonderful turn of fortune's wheel the title and estates of Combermere fall to me as next-of-kin. I only heard of it after my arrival in London, having been summoned by the family lawyers to be acquainted with the news. As soon as I could possibly get away, after settling certain business details, I returned here, rejoicing in my great good fortune, for my love's sweet sake as well as for my own; thinking myself the happiest, most fortunate man upon this earth, only to find you cruelly reproachful, for some reason which I cannot fathom. What have I offended you in, where acted wrongly? Tell me?" he ended, almost pleadingly.

Lady Sylvia lifted her lovely blue eyes to his searchingly as he finished.

"Was this your confession, all of it?" she asked very slowly. "You are sure, quite sure, that you told my father nothing more than that?"

"Quite sure," he responded at once. "I had nothing else to confess except that I loved you very dearly, with all my whole heart and soul, and desired nothing better in all the wide world than to make you my dearest wife!" he added, tenderly.

"Then you are false and more base-hearted than I thought you, Lord Combermere!" she said, with a bitter scorn in her voice. "I gave you credit for a confession which it seems you have not made. You say you wish to make me your wife. Your wife! That is impossible, for—you have a wife already!"

He started forward a couple of steps and stared at the girl with every appearance of profound amazement.

"A wife already!" he repeated, as if unable to realise what she had just said. "Are you mad or dreaming, Sylvia? You must be one or the other to say such a thing as that. I have no wife. You are labouring under some frightful mistake!"

"No," she returned, coldly. "I am labouring under no error. It is useless to try and deceive me any more with false words and assurances. I know that you have a wife. I have seen her!"

"Seen her! Seen my wife!" he echoes again, still in that tone of utter astonishment. "Where and when did you see her?"

Ah! he does not deny it any longer, thought the girl, with a cold chill at her heart, as she heard his query. Now that he finds I know the truth of his marriage he attempts no further denial.

"I saw her yesterday!" she answered, drawing away from him, as if widening the gulf between them henceforth. "She came to Burntwood in search of you, having traced you here with infinite trouble and anxiety of mind and body. I saw her, and heard her sorrowful story—heard how you married the handsome singer in Algeria, and then when your weak, butterfly passion was over, and you grew tired of the woman who was your wife, you deserted her when she was ill, alone, and penniless. Oh! but it was base and cruel of you!" she ended, indignantly.

There was a dead silence in the room for a full minute after Lady Sylvia's speech. The tall, handsome figure stood unmovable, as if endeavouring to collect his energies for a suitable answer.

Then he passed swiftly over to the girl's side, and touched her hand with a gesture of entreaty.

"You overwhelm me," he began, forcibly.

"I do not know what to say in my own defence—"

"Say nothing!" she interrupted, rapidly, dropping her hand from his touch. "I do not want to hear any defence. It is not necessary!"

"But it is necessary. You must hear it!" he went on, with a certain command. "I do not know whom you saw yesterday, or who could have told you such a story as you now repeat. I can only say that what you heard is false, absolutely and utterly false—a mere fabrication against me. If I swear to you, Sylvia," he added, passionately, seeing that his asseveration seemed to have no effect on that lovely white face which gazed at him so coldly and scornfully, "if I swear that I have no wife, that I never married either abroad or in England, and am utterly and entirely guiltless of such baseness as you impute to me, if I swear to you on the honour of a gentleman and by all I hold sacred that I have no wife, will you believe me then?"

"No!" she returned, with a tremor in her voice, for though she would have given anything to believe him, yet in the face of all she had been told she felt it was impossible, "because I should know you were swearing falsely to me. Besides," she added, turning her head and listening, "it is too late to swear even falsely now. It is useless. Your wife is here. Listen!" and she held up her hand towards the door.

There was a sound of voices in the hall outside. The library door was flung wide open, and a lady entered.

"At last!" she said, in a loud voice, as she came forward quickly into the great room. "At last I have found you, Maurice Ferrers. You cannot hide from me any more, try as you may. Now, that I have found you, false miserably coward of a husband," she went on, vindictively, "what have you to say to your wife?" And she advanced swiftly as she spoke, and faced him. The next instant she recoiled, and said, with sudden alteration of tone and manner, "You are not my husband. I have never seen you before in my life! You are not Maurice Ferrers!"

"Pardon me, I am Maurice Ferrers!" he asserted in return, as she eagerly awaited an answer. "Or rather I was Maurice Ferrers until two days ago! I am now Lord Combermere, of Combermere Abbey!"

"What does it mean? I don't understand it!" she said, fiercely, looking first at him, then at Lady Sylvia, as if seeking the elucidation in their faces. "I married Maurice Ferrers, in Algeria, so the man I married called himself, and I never doubted it for one instant. I had no reason for doubting! Was even his name false too, like his false nature? Have I been tricked in that as well as the rest? If you are the real Maurice Ferrers, who did I marry? Who is my husband? Heaven above, how shall I find him?" she ended, wildly, wringing her hands.

Lady Sylvia suddenly passed to the poor creature's side, and taking her hand led her to a seat. The girl's whole frame trembled in a revulsion of joy and relief. She could have kissed the hand she held in a transport of gladness, and almost gratitude, for this relief.

"Hush!" she said, gently, "try and be calm. We will help you to find your husband. The Earl will see that justice shall be done to you for your wrong! We are your friends from to-day, remember!"

"Ah! but you are good, so good!" murmured the poor wronged creature, gratefully. "It is weary work, searching so long in vain. It seems as if fate was always against me, and now I have no clue, not one."

"Wait a moment," Lord Combermere put in as she ceased. "You say that you have no clue now of who has practised upon you a most disgraceful and wicked fraud. Well, I am not sure that I cannot give you one to act upon, though I shall also take upon myself to

unearth this scoundrel, who has used my name to such base purpose."

"Tell me!" she said, starting up from her seat, "tell me who it is, and I will bless you to the end of my life!"

"I cannot vouch for the clue being an absolute fact until it has been properly verified; but I believe myself that the man who married you under my name will be found to be a valet my father had some few years before his death named Michael Frome, and whom he discharged for gross dishonesty connected with some cheques, while on a tour in Italy. He was a plausible scoundrel, of extremely good address and appearance."

"Curiously enough, about a year ago, I received notice that an individual had been passing himself off as Mr. Maurice Ferrers at an hotel in the North, and decamped without paying his bill, after borrowing extensively all round. This is, no doubt, the same man, and your husband; and should my surmise be a correct one, the detectives are already after him, and he is sure to be caught before very long. In the meantime you had better remain in the neighbourhood, and I will cause every inquiry to be made for your benefit, and communicate with you at once. Any help you need I promise shall be yours. I can say no more than that."

"I am deeply grateful to you," she returned, moving in the direction of the door, feeling that her presence there might be no longer desirable. "You have been more than kind and considerate to me in my unfortunate position. My one thought, my one wish since I was so cruelly deserted, is to find my husband. When I came here to-day I believed my search was ended, only to find I had been more shamefully treated than I imagined. I shall never rest content until I meet him face to face, and then—then—"

She did not finish her sentence, only walked swiftly from the room, shutting the door after her, and they heard her echoing footsteps die away in the distance.

The two were alone once more.

The grey eyes turned and rested on the pretty silent little figure, with its drooping, golden head. The next instant he was by the girl's side.

"Sylvia," he began, softly, "my love, my dearest, tell me. Do you believe me now?"

"Oh! forgive me!" she murmured, lifting her lovely blue eyes to his. "Forgive me, Maurice! I have been so very miserable because I—I loved you so much."

"Then your dear little heart is not quite broken, after all?" he said, lightly, with a tender smile, drawing her close to him caressingly.

"No," she returned, smiling too. "It is mended again now."

"And you are going to be my dearest wife, are you not?" he queried again, kissing the little golden head that rested against him so lovingly.

"Yes," she returned, with a blissful little sigh, "if you wish."

At this moment a step sounded on the terrace outside, and, looking up, they saw Sir Ronald Blair just entering through the wide open window.

He started violently as he caught sight of the two lovers, and flushed a deep crimson, a heavy frown settling on his forehead.

But Lady Sylvia gave him no time to speak a word either of anger or reproach. She ran quickly forward, took his hand, and pulled him into the room.

"Congratulate us, dear Ronald!" she began, gaily. "Congratulate Maurice and your old friend Sylvie. We are going to be married. I have quite a long story to tell you about it. Come, don't frown at me like that! Be kind, and wish me joy. You do wish us both joy, I am sure," she added, very earnestly, with a little upward glance of entreaty.

It was impossible to resist that pretty pleading face and soft voice.

"I suppose I must," he answered, only half appeased, and with a shrug. "You can't

marry both of us, that's very certain; and, since you like Ferrers best, of course I give in!"

"Yes," she said, softly, "I love my Maurice best!"

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

It is generally the man who can't waltz who declares that dancing is sinful.

A COLD is a good deal like a tram-car. A man can always catch one when he doesn't want it.

THE young man who always finds something good in the newspaper is he who carries his lunch wrapped up in it.

"Yes, Miss Frost, I always wear gloves at night; they make one's hands so soft." "Ah! and do you sleep with your hat on?"

A WIFE is a man's better half, but the fellow who elopes with her doesn't always get the better of him. He usually gets the worst.

FIREMAN: "Hurry up! there isn't a moment to spare!" She: "Oh, dear! Must I go out this way? Do tell me, please, if my hat is on straight!"

"Excuse me for running into you," said the rail to the post. "My fault," said the post. "If I hadn't been in your way and pretty well set up, you wouldn't have done it."

SOME one has sent us verses beginning, "Oh, give me back my childhood's years?" We haven't got your childhood's years. We haven't even got childhood's years of our own.

REV. DR. PRIMROSE: "Honesty is the best policy, my friend." Convict: "I know it." Rev. Dr. Primrose: "If that's so, then how did you get in here?" Convict: "Because I didn't find it out till it was too late."

CHILD: "Uncle Jonas, do you blive in signs?" Rich Uncle: "Sometimes, my boy. Why do you ask?" Child: "Cause mamma said big ears was a sign of generosity, but you didn't gimme nothin' for Christmas."

JUDGE: "And what did the prisoner say when you told him that you would have him arrested?" Complainant: "He answered mechanically, yer honour." "Explain." "He hit me on the head with a hammer."

MISS PRICILLA (aged forty): "No, Edith, I don't believe in those early marriages. You'll have time enough to get sick of a man if you stay single ten years longer!" Edith: "Time enough, auntie, but maybe no chance!"

DE JONES: "What, in your opinion, is the most tempting dish for an epicure?" Van Wiggins: "Quail on toast; but there is one thing that a man will sit down to quicker." "What is that?" "A little snow on ice."

TEACHER: "And now, my dear children, we will take a sentence—'William dislikes jam.' Now, what good little boy can tell me what William is?" That wastrel Johnny (from the bottom of the class, dogmatically): "A lass."

"Oh, no, there ain't no favourites in this family!" soliloquised Johnny; "oh, no! I guess there ain't. If I bite my finger nails I catch it over the knuckles. But the baby can eat his whole foot and they think it just cunning!"

CONCLUSIVE.—Judge: "The prisoner denies having created any disturbance as stated by you." Indignant witness (a night watchman): "But, your honour, if he didn't raise the biggest kind of a disturbance, how did I come to wake up?"

"You've been writing poetry to sister," said Willie. "Yes," admitted the youth. "What kind of a poem was that last one you sent her?" "Oh it was a sort of apostrophe." "Well, if you'd a seen the way pa acted when he saw it you'd a thought it was a whole lot of exclamation points."

DR. COCKBURN: "My good sir, what you want is thorough alteration of climate. The only thing to cure you is a long sea voyage." Patient: "That's rather inconvenient. You see, I'm only just home from a sea voyage around the world."

LADY in drug store (who has just taken a dose of belladonna, picks up a hand mirror): "Oh, my! My right pupil's ever so much larger than my left." Drug clerk (gravely): "You probably swallowed your medicine all on that side, madame."

BUTCHER BOY: "Anything else to take out?" Butcher: "Yes. This ten pound roast is to go to Mr. Wealthy's residence, and this other ten pound roast is to go to Mrs. Slim-diet's boarding-house. Now don't get them mixed, or we'll lose two customers."

MRS. MARCHMANT: "Why, Jane, where are all the young ladies? I thought I heard them come in an hour ago." Jane: "So you did, mem; they'd been to the cooking school, mem, and the three of them's been down in the kitchen ever since billin' a egg, mem."

"Ma," said Willie, who had been to the missionary sewing society with his mother. "I feel very sorry for the poor little heathen." "That's right, Willie. I am glad to see you show such a spirit." "Yes'm. I'd feel sorry for anybody that had to wear the clothes that you people were making to-day."

Two Newcastle youths were speaking about another young man, who was known to them only by repute, when one of them observed: "Aa've hard it said that he can talk French just like English!" "Wey," returned his companion, "that's the way as taak't it when as we was at the Paris Exhibition, and nobody knaa'd what as said!"

MR. OLDBUCK: "Woman, you have disgraced me! Do you hear? Disgraced me!" His Young Wife: "Why, dear, I am sure that it was only an innocent chat we had. I was not flirting; indeed I was not." Oldbuck: "Oh, I don't mind your flirting. You can't help it. You are built that way. But you told that young sprig that I was your father."

THE squire of a certain parish going the round of his domain met with a poor navy trespassing. "What are you doing here, sir?" exclaimed the Squire. "Don't you know that no one is allowed to trespass here?" "Wey, sir," replied Willy, "aw didn't knaw who's ground it is, but aw've n'yen o' my awn, an aw mun be on somebody else's, aw cawn't walk anudder the grand."

JUDGE: "As far as I can see there are no mitigating circumstances in favour of your client." Counsel for the prisoner: "No mitigating circumstances! Your honour must have forgotten that the murdered man having already deposited his money, my unfortunate client took nothing but his life." Judge: "Well, that's all the law proposes to take from your client. Next Friday is the day I set for the execution."

"WHERE is the dashing boarder who used to be the life of the table when I was here before, Mrs. Livermore?" asked an old patron of the house, addressing the landlady. "I married him," was the quiet reply. "Indeed! He was one of the sprightliest fellows I ever met, always bubbling over with spirits and chock full of stories. He's away from home, I suppose; I haven't seen him since I returned." "He's at home; he has never been away." "Indeed! Where is he, then?" "He's in the kitchen washing dishes."

A LADY had in her employment a young man from the country. On certain occasions he was instructed to inform any company who might ring at the door that "Mrs. Blank was not at home." One day John made this reply to a lady, who shortly went away, leaving a card and a promise to call again. As the card was handed to his mistress, she said: "John, what did you say to the lady?" "I told her you were not at home." "Well, I hope you did not laugh." "Oh, no, ma'am," said John; "I never laugh when I tell a lie."

SOCIETY.

It is amusing to read in a daily paper that visitors were admitted to the State apartments at Windsor recently "by courtesy of the palace officials." As a matter of fact, the officials have their orders about such matters defined with absolute rigidity, and the slightest deviation from them would lead to sharp reprimand and probable dismissal.

Some of the straw hats for the country look as if made of wood shavings; others are made of two or three kinds of straw plaited together.

The will of the late Mrs. FitzGeorge shows that that lady forgot none of those staunch and true friends that her own most amiable qualities attracted to her, and kept by her in close affection throughout her life.

The loyal citizens of Cologne have provided a magnificent cup of gold and enamel, which is to be exclusively used by the Emperor of Germany in drinking toasts whenever he pays a State visit to the city.

The dukes of Boston do not fasten their immaculate cuffs with sleeve links set with catseyes and diamonds; they are now tied together with dainty, narrow pale ribbon. A little woman, who knows almost everything there is going, says that the dear boys are now tying their cuffs with ribbons contributed from some portion of the lingerie of their sweethearts.

The Princess Christian's second daughter, Princess Louise, will come out this year, and be presented at one of the May Drawing-rooms. She is tall and handsome, with a fine figure, and is very lively and amusing. She is sure to be a popular member of the Royal Family.

The Princess of Wales is again fretted and tired with anxiety about her sister and brother-in-law the Czar and Czarina. The Princess has had a slight cold and feverish attack. Her Royal Highness suffers greatly from nervousness when news from the Russian capital is such as to give ground for grave uneasiness.

"The playtime of the others" seems to have affected the little Crown Prince of Germany well-nigh as pathetically as it did Elizabeth Barrett Browning, but in her case the outcome was an exquisite poem—in his, a whipping. Poor little coming Kaiser! It is said that he and his brother Eitel undergo seven hours' drill and military evolutions every day, as well as three hours' reading and writing. No wonder they have set up a very realistic "Cry of the children" on their own small account.

Mrs. Patti said to a Denver reporter: "The human voice, if preserved up to a certain period will retain its richness and flexibility almost indefinitely. As you ought to know I have always been careful of myself, and at no time in my professional or private career has my voice suffered from overwork. Hence I am as capable to-day of captivating an audience as I was many years ago. I expect that my voice will be as good in twenty years from now if I continue to enjoy good health."

The "woman who puts you into mourning," though quite a recent invention, has become indispensable in America. She sees to everything in the shape of gowns, bonnets, note-paper, and cards, fills in the necessary shadows in the rooms of the house, and lifts the burden of thought off those upon whom it would fall but for her and her novel profession. America thinks that she is an importation from England, but she is as yet unknown in this country.

The latest craze among the fashionables of New York is to set floral dishes before the guests at ladies' luncheon parties. Stewed lilies is one of the most in request of these "plats," and it is *chic* to partake of it.

STATISTICS.

In England and Wales the average duration of married life has been computed at about 27 years.

WHAT becomes of all the books that are published? From the figures now available for last year it appears that 1,040 novels and tales left the press, theological works to the number of 630 coming next.

If the sun was a hollow sphere the earth could be placed in the centre of it; with the moon moving round it at its mean distance of 237,000 miles, and there would still be more than 200,000 miles between the moon and the edge of the sun.

THE population of Islington exceeds that of any other parish in the United Kingdom. The figures given in the last census returns were 270,000, and the number of inhabitants at the present time is estimated at upwards of 300,000. It maintains two large workhouses and an infirmary and a workhouse school in the parish. The indoor poor number—men, 913; women, 836; and children, 503. Outdoor poor—males, 375; females, 1,388; and children, 1,241. Making in all a total of indoor and outdoor poor of over 5,000.

GEMS.

WHAT oxygen is to the air cheerfulness is to the home.

ONE learns more metaphysics from a single temptation than from all the philosophers.

It is well to remember that slander, like mud, dries and falls off. That to wait and be patient soothes many a pang. That all are not princes who ride with the emperor. That correction is good when administered in season. That you will never have a friend if you must have one without failings.

If you should wish to be miserable, you must think about yourself—about what you want, what you like, what respect people ought to pay to you, what people think of you, and then to you nothing will be para. You will spoil everything you touch; you will make sin and misery for yourself out of everything which God sends you; you will be as wretched as you choose.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

If any housekeeper finds it imperative to clean windows on an icy cold day, she can accomplish it safely by using a cloth moistened with alcohol, which never freezes.

A TABLESPOONFUL of kerosene added to the soap and water in which floors are washed will help greatly in making them clean, and will leave the paint fresh and bright. Much less soap is, of course, used.

TROPICAL SNOW.—Peel juicy oranges, divide into lobes and cut across three times; remove all the seeds, put a layer in a glass dish, sprinkle with sugar, and pour on a little sherry; then add a layer of sliced bananas, and cover the whole with desiccated cocoanut; repeat the layers if desired; add beaten egg to the top, and serve with delicate cake. This dessert should be served soon after being prepared, as the oranges become tough in the wine.

CARNAFFS.—Take some cold cooked ham and chop it fine, season with pepper. Put a table-spoonful of butter and an even table-spoonful of flour in a saucepan; mix, and add a gill of cream; stir continually until it boils, take it from the fire, add the well-beaten yolks of four eggs, and a half-pint of chopped ham. Put this into buttered cups, stand them in a baking-pan half filled with hot water, cover with paper, and cook in the oven for twenty minutes. Serve with cream sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

It is curious to find that vegetables three hundred years ago were regularly imported, cabbages and onions being sent from Holland to Holl. And such vegetables as were used were salted down extensively.

A BRONZE statue of Shakespeare is to be erected in the Lincoln Park at Chicago by the trustees of a recently deceased merchant of that city, who left £2,500 for the purpose.

CREMONA violins have greatly risen in value during the present century. While seventy years ago one hundred guineas was considered an extravagant price, even for a Stradivarius in prime condition, we hear nowadays of sums of ten, nay, twenty times that amount offered in vain for some rare old violin.

A WELL-KNOWN man on the turf once remarked: "In racing you have all sorts of odds against you. The trainer cheats, the jockey cheats, the owner cheats; and when, as sometimes happens, they are all of accord to run a straight race, then the horse will cheat and refuse to go a yard when he is called upon to win the race."

THE Roman game of chess was something like our game of fox and goose. A certain number of coloured pieces represented brigands, who had to take a fortress. These pieces were made of crystal, and sometimes of precious stones. The game of dominoes or "bones," was played as it is still played in every school and playground in France. Dice was the most favourite game of all, and the game that the poets mention the most.

COMPARATIVELY few know that the expression "Take the cake" originated in the negro cake-walks common in the Southern States, and not unknown in the Northern. The walk usually winds up with a ball. Couples, drawn by lot, walk round a cake specially prepared for the occasion, and umpires award the prize to the couple who, in their opinion, walk round most gracefully and are attired with the greatest taste. Hence they are said to take the cake, an expression which has attained its wide currency through negro minstrel burlesques.

APRIL is sometimes called "the rainbow month." The German Professor Reineberg asserts that the ancient Teuton styled the rainbow the Bridge of the Gods, also the Living Road; the Lithuanian peasants call it the Sceptre of the Weather; the Czechs, the Circle of Heaven; the Carinthians, the Slippery Bow; the Bavarians, the Ring of Jove, or of the Sun; the Loreness, St. Bernard's Belt, or St. Bernard's Crown; the Spaniards, St. Martin's Arch. In the Tyrol the peasants believe that at present the rainbow brings fine weather, but that one day or other it will bring rain which will last for ever. These last cannot believe in the Bible promise that there shall not be a Second Deluge.

PROBABLY there is nothing under the sun which is the basis of so large a number of figures of speech as water. A poor argument "won't hold water;" a babbler is "a leaky vessel;" a half-drunken man is "half seas over;" "fishing in troubled waters" is another name for getting into difficulty; "still water runs deep" is a hint that your quiet and demure person has more in him than the world supposes; strong dislikes are compared to his Satanic majesty's antipathy to "holy water;" if a man is in a bad predicament he is in "hot water;" disappointment is "a wet blanket;" when a lover gets "the mitten" "cold water is thrown on his hopes;" the hungry man's "mouth waters;" the strengthless are "weak as water;" sometimes it "rains" blessings; when an orator begins to be tedious we say he has "run dry;" news is always "afloat;" speculators are often "swamped;" many people find it impossible to "keep their heads above water;" and very often, in the absence of data for conjecture, we are "all at sea."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

H. H.—The Suez Canal is a hundred miles long.
JOHN.—Your husband is entitled to make your house his home at any time.

H. B.—Berry, the executioner, does not receive a yearly salary, but a fee for each execution.
B. D.—There is no limit to the number of consecutive years for which a mayor may be re-elected.

A. CONSTANT READER.—The address of the Royal Astronomical Society is Burlington House, Piccadilly.
F. M. H.—War was declared between France and Germany on 19th July, 1870; the treaty of peace was signed on 10th May, 1871.

GODFREY.—A locomotive of a passenger train starting on a journey of a hundred miles carries about three thousand gallons of water.

TENANT.—A tenant of a small weekly house who refuses to leave on the expiration of a proper notice, can be expelled on a magistrates' warrant.

GREVILLE.—Whales are exceptions to the mammals. They live during the summer in the cold regions and come south every winter into warmer waters.

J.—Three P.M. is the average hour of the greatest heat in summer. In regard to the other hours named, we believe the average to be before rather than after three.

CONSTANT READER.—A person sentenced to penal servitude for life is often, though by no means necessarily or invariably, liberated at the end of twenty years.

BESSIE.—A gorilla is an animal of the oursing species—a sort of monstrous man-monkey, with the strength of a rhinoceros, the agility of an ape, and the ferocity of a tiger.

DICK.—1. The number of English-speaking people in the world is about a hundred millions. 2. In 1888 the total value of British imports and exports was £685,520,970.

J. GRIMMER.—A workman is not entitled to a bank holiday as a matter of right, and if he stops away against orders the master would be legally justified in dismissing him.

AUDREY.—You seem to confuse conceit and self-respect. Vanity is the most prominent quality in the aggregate of qualities known as conceit, whereas it has no place in the aggregate known as self-respect.

GERMAN.—The longest speech on record was recently delivered in the Parliament at Bucharest, Roumania. It lasted thirty-six hours; and it is not strange that the listeners were far more "tired" than the speaker.

J. JAMER.—A Prime Minister, as such, receives no salary. Mr. Gladstone, in his last Administration, was First Lord of the Treasury only; but he has twice held that office and the Chancellorship of the Exchequer at the same time.

READER.—The expression, "when I begin I will also make an end," is Biblical, and not Shakespearian. It occurs in the admonition addressed by the "man of God," to Eli, the high priest, when he was taken to task for the iniquities of his sons, Hophni and Phineas.

TIERED STUDENT.—According to the English notation, a trillion is a product of a million involved to the third power, and expressed by a unit with eighteen ciphers annexed; according to the French notation it is the number expressed by a unit with twelve ciphers annexed.

DORIS.—The left arm and hand might be cultivated to the same degree of dexterity, which literally means right-handedness, as the right arm and hand, but it involves trouble, time and patience, and therefore is neglected. The left arm has good reason to complain of this injustice.

AN OLD READER.—The height of the Chinese giant, Chang-Woo-Goo, was seven feet six inches. He was exhibited in London in 1865-6. The Irish giant, Patrick Cotter, was eight feet seven and a half inches high. He died in 1802. Captain Bates, of Kentucky, was seven feet eleven inches high.

NIXIE.—Women with very small hands have the advantage in the glove market. There is always an overplus of 5½'s, and they are sold cheap. A woman who can wear this number and can tell a good glove when she sees it—not a difficult thing to do if you have an eye for it—can always be well gloved.

WORKER.—It is doubtful if the musty smell of old paste can be removed from books, but a third or two of musk kept in the book, or a single drop of otto of roses placed in where the book is stitched or fastened, would probably hide the smell. A pinch of salicylic acid put in paste when made will prevent its becoming musty.

MISSON.—1. We never recommend cosmetics of any sort. A girl in health should not require anything of the kind. Fresh air and soap and water are the best things for the complexion. A little glycerine and rose water is sometimes useful to remove roughness. 2. The meaning of health is solitude; of the shamrock, light-headedness.

ANXIOUS MOTHER.—Do not coddle your boy. If he is sick, nurse him as tenderly as you please, but do not coddle him, and make him sick for the sake of nursing him. Teach him to be manly and independent, to have a courage for any fate, and nine chances in ten are in his grasp for success in life, for it is not the timid, hesitating, apprehensive man who rises, but the man who sees the opportunity, and who says I will grasp it.

MARY.—For people who require a wreath or crown that will look creditable when others have shrivelled up and turned brown, some really effective articles are now made with grasses and dried flowers. You might imagine these to be vulgar, but they are not when arranged by the right hands. They last a long time, and can even be sent to the Colonies.

PRINCE.—One of the British regiments, the Eighth Hussars, has a grackle for a pet, and it is called "the child of the regiment." It accompanies the regiment everywhere, and is an especially conspicuous figure on the Sunday church parade, when it accompanies the band, leading the line, with a stately tread, apparently imitated from that of the drum major.

A. F.—Boxing children's ears when they need correction is a barbarous custom, apt to induce deafness in later years. The fashion of boring the ears, that jewels may dangle therefrom, is one which seems to be passing away, and it is one which ought never to be revived in a civilised country. A well-formed ear is ornament enough to the face without seeking to beautify it further by metal decorations.

COMPETITOR.—All systems of phonographic shorthand date back to Isaac Pitman, of Bath, England, who introduced the science of phonography, or writing by sound. Several systems, differing somewhat from the original Pitman one, have been devised, and some of them may, perhaps, be improvements on it. Any system is of service, and it is largely a matter of opinion as to which is the best.

A DREAM VISIT.

When you are wrapt in happy sleep,
 I walk about your house at night.
 With many a wistful, stealthy peep
 At what I've loved by morning light.

Your head is on the pillow laid,
 My feet are where your footsteps were;
 Your soul to other lands has strayed,
 My heart can hear you breathe and stir.

I seat me in your wonted chair,
 And open your book a little space;
 I touch the flowers that knew your care,
 The mirror that reflects your face.

I kiss the pen that spoke your thought,
 The spot whereon you knelt to pray,
 The message with your wisdom fraught,
 Writ down on paper yesterday.

The garment that you lately wore,
 The threshold that your step goes by,
 The music that you fingered o'er,
 The picture that contents your eye.

Yet when you wake from happy sleep
 And, busy here and busy there,
 You take your wonted morning peep
 At what is good and what is fair.

"He has been here," you will not say;
 My prying face you will not find.
 You'll think, "He is a mile away,"
 My love hath left no mark behind.

B. E.

CLOCK LOCK.—We know of no instance in which a time lock has been tampered with without injury to the lock, and bank men and those who should know best about the matter insist that no safe or vault protected by a time lock can possibly be opened, without destroying the lock, before the time set for the lock has elapsed. The destruction of the lock would be likely to involve the destruction of the vault.

LOVER OF SONG.—The sunflower does not turn to the sun, whatever the poet Moore may say to the contrary. On the same stem may be seen flowers in every direction, and not one of them changes the direction in which it has first opened. As remarked by a writer on the subject, the name of the flower is "more likely to be due to the resemblance of its head to the old pictorial representations of the sun as a disk surrounded by flaming rays."

SALOME.—1. To make coffee from carrots, wash and scrape the outside off; then cut them in pieces about half-an-inch square, and dry on a stove. Parch and grind like coffee, or mix equal portions of carrot and coffee, and grind together. 2. To make barley coffee, take clean, good barley, and wash it well through two or three waters; then put it into boiling water over the fire, and let it boil until it swells sufficiently to burst some of the grains; then take it off and drain it, and dry it in the sun, or in an oven after baking, or slowly by the fire. It is then ready to parch as coffee. It must be boiled and cleared in the same manner as coffee.

ALIX.—The modes of execution in different countries is thus summarised: Austria, gallows, public; Bavaria, guillotine, private; Belgium, guillotine, public; Brunswick, axe, private; China, sword or cord, public; Denmark, guillotine, public; Ecuador, musket, public; France, guillotine, public; Great Britain, gallows, private; Hanover, guillotine, private; Italy, capital punishment abolished; Netherlands, gallows, public; Odenberg, musket, public; Portugal, gallows, public; Prussia, sword, private; Russia, musket, gallows, or sword, public; Saxony, guillotine, private; Spain, garrote, public; Switzerland: fifteen cantons, sword, public; two cantons, guillotine, public; and two cantons, guillotine, private; United States, other than New York, gallows, mostly private.

SUFFERER.—The common use of soda to correct acidity in the stomach is an error. A counter acid is a safer corrective than an alkali. A little lemon or lime juice, properly used, will remedy the trouble as often as anything. In some cases a very little sugar occasionally, alternated with cold water, is found effective. Sometimes hot water is the best thing.

AMATEUR.—Modern chemistry shows that the medical lore of the ancient herbalists had a much sounder basis than had been imagined. In 1507 water cresses were recommended for the cure of scurvy and scrofula. Chemists now say that the cress contains sulphur, phosphorus, iodine and iron—substances that are known to be actual antidotes to scrofula.

FOR WELSH FARMER.—Take square slices of stale bread without crust; butter them, and dip in a bowl of hot water. Lay on a heated dish and set to keep warm. Put half a pint of milk in a small saucepan; stand it over a moderate fire; when boiling, add a pint and a half of grated or crumbed cheese, stir until it melts, season with salt and pepper, add the yolks of two eggs, stir, and pour over the toast.

H. L.—Women are finding a new occupation in serving legal papers, said a well-known lawyer recently. Almost all prominent law firms employ a man solely to serve papers; but often the server runs up against some individual whom it is impossible for him to get at. The most wary debtor will not suspect a woman of having clandestine designs against him, and a well-dressed female paper-server can easily gain admittance where it would be impossible for a man to enter.

S. V.—1. The monkey is a mammal of the order of four-footed animals. The word monkey is supposed to be from the Old Italian monicchio, a monkey, which is from monna, an old woman; so the animal is so-called because it looks like an old woman. 2. Monkeys were exhibited at fairs in England more than two hundred years ago. 3. The species most nearly resembling man in form, as the orang-outang and gorilla, are often called man-apes. Some species resemble man in form and many points of structure.

D. D.—The juice of apples does not become elder until it has fermented or worked. When first pressed out it is sweet. In other words, apple juice is only sugar and water, flavoured with the taste of the apple. After it has stood a while the working or fermentation takes place. The water or that which makes the flavour is not changed, but the sugar is, which has become alcohol. As before stated, it is the same in making wine, the grape juice being only sugar and water, flavoured with the taste of the grape. By fermentation the grape juice becomes wine.

PAUL.—The Sardonyx, according to Webster, is of a reddish-yellow, or nearly orange colour. A French authority says it is a stone displaying alternate layers successively whitish and carmine red. The same authority states that Sardonyx is considered by many mineralogists as identical with Sardonius. Engravers, however, recognise between these two stones a marked difference, the Sardonyx being an agate whose deep colour partakes both of yellow and red without either colour predominating. In colour, therefore, the Sardonyx differs completely from the Sardonius.

WORRIED ANNIE.—There are various recipes for making good coffee, but the following is about as excellent a one as we know of: Pour boiling water on the coffee in the pot, and place on the stove. Just as soon as it comes to a boil, or as soon as four or five bubbles have risen, take it off the fire and pour out a teacupful and return it; set it down for a minute or so; then pour gently over the top one teacupful of cold water; let it stand a minute longer, and it will be bright and clear. The cold water, by its greater density, sinks and carries the grounds with it to the bottom of the pot.

A CORRESPONDENT, whom we thank for his courtesy, has sent us some very interesting statistics concerning the traffic between this country and Australia. Only within the last twenty years the Pacific and Oriental steamers have increased from 1,600 to 6,500 tons, being four times larger than they were in 1869, and their speed has developed to a remarkable degree. In twenty years the time taken by the voyages of the Company's ships has decreased from forty-seven days to thirty-one days, a delightful lessening for sea-sick passengers. In one instance the mails from London were delivered in Australia in twenty-five days and six hours from their leaving London.

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